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THIS IS OUR FAITH

THIS IS OUR FAITH

*An Explanation of the Articles of
the Christian Faith as contained in
the Apostles' Creed*

By

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DEDICATED
TO
MY FELLOW-MEMBERS OF
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
MEN'S SOCIETY
IN THIS COUNTRY
AND THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Foreword	9
I	
BELIEF IN GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH	
CHAPTER	
I. I Believe in God	15
II. The Grounds of Our Belief	21
III. Difficulties of Belief	45
IV. Alternatives to Belief	59
A Note on the word "Almighty"	72

II

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

V. I Believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord	79
VI. Who was Conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary	99
VII. Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was Crucified, Dead and Buried	104
VIII. He Descended into Hell	117
IX. The third day He rose again from the Dead	124

THIS IS OUR FAITH

CHAPTER	PAGE
X. He ascended into Heaven, and Sitteth on the Right Hand of God the Father Almighty	138
XI. From thence He shall come to Judge the Quick and the Dead	149

III

BELIEF IN THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

XII. I Believe in the Holy Ghost	157
A Note on the Doctrine of the Trinity	176
XIII. The Holy Catholic Church	184
XIV. The Communion of Saints	210
XV. The Forgiveness of Sins	216
XVI. The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting	229
Notes and References	245
Suggested Questions for Group Dis- cussion	251

FOREWORD

WE are made Christians by baptism; and, before an adult is baptised, he is asked whether he believes all the articles of the Christian faith, as these are contained in the Apostles' Creed. The test of belief for the Christian, therefore, is the Apostles' Creed. There is much which might reasonably be held to come within the category of Christian belief of which this Creed says nothing. The meaning of Inspiration as applied to the Bible may serve as an example. But in this book I have thought well to confine myself almost entirely to the consideration of the statements of the Apostles' Creed. Nor has it come within the scope of my task—except incidentally—to deal with the practical duties which belong to Christian discipleship. These might form the subject of another volume if this little book should prove useful to those for whom it is written.

For some time I have been conscious that many of those who are regular worshippers in our churches, and therefore, repeat the Apostles' Creed at least once or twice a week, might not find it easy to meet the challenge of an enquirer who should say to them: "You are constantly repeating the Apostles' Creed, and, presumably, you understand what you say. Would you explain to me what you mean when week by week you declare your belief in 'God the Father Almighty,' in the 'Communion of Saints'

THIS IS OUR FAITH

and in ‘the Resurrection of the body?’’ It is not, I think, unfair to suggest that many Church-going Christian people would find it difficult to give an adequate answer to such questions. This I feel to be unsatisfactory.

Accordingly, I have tried to put down in simple language both the meaning of the clauses of the Apostles’ Creed, and some justification of the beliefs which are therein expressed. To write a book for theologians would be quite beyond my capacity; the people whom I have had in view are men and women who have not very much time for study, but who really wish to understand and grasp the meaning of the faith which they profess. Long experience in giving addresses, followed by discussion, to groups of men, has convinced me of the widespread desire on the part of many to be intelligent, as well as sincere, Christians.

Moreover, if arguments do not always produce conviction, which is more often the result of experience, Christian beliefs are justified at the bar of reason. Indeed I would go further and say that no one but a Christian can give a reasonable explanation of the meaning and purpose of life. More and more am I impressed with the bankruptcy of scepticism. If, then, there is no tolerable alternative to Christian belief, it is all the more important that Christian conviction should be both intelligent and strong. It is the aim of this book to help towards that end.

It may be said that there are already many such books as this—books written in explanation of the

FOREWORD

Christian faith; and why should another be added to the list? My answer would be that no two men think alike, and that there may be value if the truth is presented from different angles. It is also true that a clergyman who has lived and worked in the Church for several years will have come into friendly association with a large number of people who, just because they know him, may be willing to read his book but would not necessarily read a similar and better book by a writer wholly unknown to them.

The publication, in January 1938, of the Report of the doctrinal Commission—the result of many years of labour on the part of several distinguished scholars—is likely for some considerable time to provoke discussion as to the real nature and extent of the Church's beliefs.

At such a time it is possible that the ordinary man may find use for a simple, plain explanation of the essential Christian faith, as this is authoritatively expressed in the Creed which all baptised and confirmed members of the Church have accepted.

For many years I have had a growing dislike of footnotes. Frequently, even in the middle of a sentence, those who adopt this form of irritation interrupt our attempt to follow their argument by requiring us to look at the foot of the page, where we find a comment on the matter in hand, to which we must turn our attention; and sometimes the comment is so prolonged that it stretches over to the next page, from which in due course we have to return to the original sentence in a state of mild annoyance. Moreover, the

THIS IS OUR FAITH

use of footnotes may well disfigure the appearance of the printed page.

Here I have avoided footnotes, and at the end of the book have put some references to passages quoted in the text, for the convenience of those who may care to know the source of such quotations.

A few years ago, the St. Christopher Press published for me a pamphlet entitled "The Life of the World to Come," from which, by kind permission of the publishers, some paragraphs are incorporated in three or four chapters of this book.

In case the book should be used by members of study circles, I have appended a series of questions on its several chapters for purposes of group discussion.

BERNARD: ELIEN:

ELY,

February 1938

I

BELIEF IN GOD THE FATHER
ALMIGHTY, MAKER OF
HEAVEN AND EARTH

CHAPTER I

(I) "I BELIEVE IN GOD"

*One in whom persuasion and belief
Had ripened into faith, and faith became
A passionate intuition.*

WM. WORDSWORTH

A LIEUTENANT in the O.T.C. told me of a sergeant-major who was preparing some raw recruits for attendance at a Church Parade. Apparently he was explaining the form of service at which they were to be present; and, in the course of his explanation, he had reached the point at which the Apostles' Creed is recited. Here his instructions to the men were given in these terms: "When the parson first says 'I believe' you stand by and say nothing: them words is merely cautionary, and has no significance."

Though we know what was in the sergeant's mind, we must contest his reluctance to attach "significance" to the words "I believe"; for each of them is most significant.

The Creeds which have been in use in different parts of the Church throughout the ages are very numerous; and some of them employ the singular and some the plural pronouns; some beginning with the words "I believe," others with the words

THIS IS OUR FAITH

“We believe.” In the so-called Athanasian Creed in our Prayer Book, the word “I” does not occur, but such a clause is found as the following: “The right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man.” In the cases, however, of the Apostles’ and of the Nicene Creed, as printed in our Prayer Book, the opening words are “I believe.” The use of the singular personal pronoun implies the responsibility of each Christian for his own belief. In other words, it is not enough for any of us to say “The Church believes this, and I am a member of the Church, and I accept whatever the Church believes.” It must be our endeavour to reach personal conviction in respect of “all the articles of the Christian faith as contained in the Apostles’ Creed.”

When those who come to receive the laying on of hands in Confirmation are about to be confirmed, they are asked whether they ratify and confirm in their own persons the promise and vow that was made in their name at Baptism, and acknowledge themselves bound to believe and to do what was then undertaken for them. The rubric which immediately follows runs: “*and everyone shall audibly answer ‘I do.’*”

Is it not fair to say that every adult Christian should be able to repeat the Creed with conviction; and, moreover, with a conviction which

BELIEF IN GOD

grows ever stronger as the years pass? It is true that such conviction comes chiefly as a result of experience; but it is a primary necessity that we should understand the meaning of the words and phrases in which the faith of Christendom is expressed; and the purpose of this book is to help those who read it to that understanding of the Faith, without which real conviction can hardly be reached.

Let us now consider the nature of "belief."

First, let me lay it down that belief in spiritual truths is relative rather than absolute; or, to put the matter in very plain language, that we do not either believe or not believe, but rather believe more or less. The point can be made clear if we compare belief in a doctrine with knowledge of some particular fact, for example of a proposition in Arithmetic. Anyone's knowledge of the fact that $2 + 2 = 4$ can be absolute. He can know it perfectly. It is said that, in the course of an argument, a man once remarked that no one was supposed to be infallible—"But I am infallible," he said, "on the multiplication table." What he meant was, no doubt, that he knew it absolutely, that he had 100 per cent knowledge of its statements. And that may well have been true. In the realm of belief, however, which is in a far higher category, we do not attain the same

THIS IS OUR FAITH

perfection. There are degrees of faith; and we all have to say, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief." By which we do not mean that we are without faith, but rather signify our sense that our faith is imperfect. As the mercury in a thermometer rises and falls, so the level of faith is not constant. It is questionable whether anyone believes all the articles of the Christian faith with equal conviction; and no one, surely, believes any particular article of the faith with unvarying conviction. Moreover—as few of us (I imagine) have seen the mercury in a thermometer either at the top or at the bottom of the glass, so no one will dare to claim that his faith is perfect; and it is unlikely that anyone is entirely devoid of religious faith. The most thorough-going sceptic must experience occasions when he wonders whether after all he may not be wrong and the believers right. As Browning puts it:

*All we have gained then by our unbelief
Is a life of doubt diversified by faith
For one of faith diversified by doubt:
We called the chess-board white—we call it black.¹*

The realisation of the fact that faith is a variable quality is often a help to those who are very conscious of the imperfection of their own belief. Indeed doubt seems to be the inevitable accompaniment of faith, until faith is made perfect; and it must not be allowed unduly to oppress us. If,

BELIEF IN GOD

at times, the mercury seems to stand low in the thermometer—well, Winter will pass, Summer will return, and faith revive.

In this connection it is important to realise that an act of faith in God is something much greater than the mere admission of the fact of God's existence; to believe in God is more than to believe that there is a God. St. James is very caustic on this subject: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe and tremble."¹

Faith, for a Christian, is something much more than this intellectual acceptance of a dogma. As the late Canon Scott Holland once said, it is "the attitude and temper of a son towards a father."² And the growth of faith "means the gradual increase of this personal contact, this spiritual intimacy between father and son." Or as Dr. W. Temple says: "The heart of religion is not an opinion about God such as philosophy might reach as the conclusion of its argument. It is a personal relationship with God."³

Other faculties, that is to say, than those of the head are involved in the act of faith; not the mind only but the heart and the will. Love, trust, obedience, service—all these are involved in the fulfilment of faith; which is "not the holding of correct doctrine but personal fellowship with the living God."

THIS IS OUR FAITH

Later on we shall have to consider more fully how faith can be increased and strengthened. For the moment it must be enough to say that while we need to use our minds for belief in God —for not only is it true that belief in God is conformable to the highest reason, but also that the rejection of that belief is unreasonable—we must also gain confidence in the goodness of God; and we must “will to do His will,” if we would know of the doctrine whether it be true. Is it not, in fact, the case that the old Church Catechism expresses the essentials of belief in the words in which is set out man’s duty towards God: “My duty towards God is to believe in Him, to fear Him, and to love Him with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul, and with all my strength; to worship Him, to give Him thanks, to put my whole trust in Him, to call upon Him, to honour His Holy Name and His Word, and to serve Him truly all the days of my life.”

That is the way to belief in God.

CHAPTER II

THE GROUNDS OF OUR BELIEF

*Now God forbid that Faith be blind assent
Grasping what others know; else Faith were nought,
But learning, as of some far continent
 Which others sought,
And carried thence, better the tale to teach,
Pebbles and shells, poor fragments of the beach.*

*Nay then, if proof and tortured argument
Content thee—teach thee that the Lord is there,
Or risen again; I pray thee be content,
 But leave me here
With eye unsealed by any proof of thine,
With eye unsealed to know the Lord is mine.*

ROBERT HUGH BENSON

No one would question the importance of this fundamental article of belief. Indeed there can hardly be any subject of greater importance; for, apart from belief in God (and from consequent belief in a future life) there seems to be no possibility of understanding the meaning or purpose of human existence. If there be *no* God, then indeed life is

. . . a tale
*Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.¹*

Moreover, there seems to be in man an instinct which causes him to *demand* God. Let me suppose

THIS IS OUR FAITH

that one who has found life full of interest, full of opportunity, has come to the edge of the Beyond; he has to ask himself, "Shall I vanish into nothingness? Shall I soon be as though I had not been?" And the thought is intolerable. Eagerly he cries out:

*O somewhere, somewhere, God unknown,
Exist and be!
I am dying, I am all alone
I must have Thee.²*

Or suppose another whose comrades, one by one, fall out as the march proceeds, till he is left alone; or yet another whose life is bound up in that of an only child—lost after a short sharp illness or in the misfortune of war. These may feel as if they were caught in the wheels of a great machine, blind Fate, which is utterly careless of their hopes and fears; and from their hearts rises the passionate demand that there should be, in this universe, another power—stronger than "Fate," moral, just, purposeful, loving—the pledge that "love is love for evermore." This is the "demand" for God. Some think that it constitutes a valid argument; but at least it underlines the urgency and importance of our subject.

Moreover, when we face the practical issue of daily conduct, it is clear that this will be affected—indeed, to a large degree, determined—by our

BELIEF IN GOD

Creed. No popular saying is so fallacious as the saying "It doesn't matter what a man believes so long as he lives a good life," or to give the sentiment its poetical form:

*For forms of faith let graceless zealots fight
He can't be wrong whose life is in the right.*

Such sentiments are foolish, partly because it certainly matters very much to us what we believe—many people long to believe in God and the future life and find themselves unable to do so—but chiefly because the sayings *imply* that conduct is independent of creed. To say that "it doesn't matter what you believe so long as you live a good life" is like saying that "it doesn't matter what you eat so long as you keep well"; whereas, as every one knows, health depends largely upon diet. Similarly conduct depends largely upon belief. Assume the case of two men; one has strong faith in God's love and care, and in a future life; the other thinks of heaven as empty, and supposes that "when we are dead we are done with"—to quote the common saying. Inevitably the lives of these two men will differ markedly the one from the other—and that, because of belief in one case and lack of belief in the other.

There is no need further to emphasise the point.

THIS IS OUR FAITH

Let us now ask the momentous question: "What do we mean by 'God'?"

Various definitions have been attempted; such as "the mysterious power which is finding expression in the universe," or "the something, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness," and so forth. Some time ago Mr. H. G. Wells propounded a theory which amounted almost to a form of dualism. He wrote of a "Veiled Being" somewhere in the background, about whom we know nothing; and of another being—apparently finite—our leader and captain, our "invisible King," who struggles, with us, against the evil which is in the world. The "Veiled Being" might be compared to the engine in a great factory which keeps the machinery going, but which most of the workers, not being allowed to go into the engine room, may never have seen. The "comrade God" becomes only a kind of superman, finite like ourselves.

Passing by these definitions let us repeat the question: What do *we* mean by God? Dr. Inge has said: "We may define theism as the doctrine that the ultimate ground of the universe is a single supreme Being who is perfect, or complete, in Himself. This definition . . . is incompatible with the theory of a limited non-omnipotent God which has been advanced from time to time to account for the evil of the world,

BELIEF IN GOD

from which it is desired to exonerate the creator.”³

Is such “theism” justifiable? is the question which we have to ask. But we must begin at the beginning. To put the matter quite bluntly: “Is there anything anywhere to show for God?”

We may say to ourselves, “He is with us here to-day,” but our senses take no account of Him. Could He conceivably be seen? Is the “vision of God” only a feeling—a consciousness? Is God properly comparable to such qualities as reverence or courage, which have no substantial existence, although they are very real? There is a curious passage in one of the writings of the Sadhu Sundar Singh in which he says:

“When I entered Heaven for the first time I looked all round me, and then I asked ‘Where is God?’ And they answered and said unto me, ‘God is seen here as little as on earth, for God is infinite. But Christ is here. He is the image of the invisible God, and only in Him can anyone see God, either here or upon earth.’”

The Sadhu’s dream or vision came to him while he was in the body; but, in the next world, might he still ask his question and get the same answer?

Let us turn to the first of the Articles of Religion, printed at the end of our Prayer Book.

THIS IS OUR FAITH

It begins with these words: "There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts or passions, of infinite power, wisdom and goodness." The words may be true, and yet hardly help us in any way to realise God.

The writer of the Book of the Revelation speaks of himself as "in the Spirit on the Lord's Day," and responding to the voice that bade him "Come up hither." A door, he tells us, was opened in heaven, and "behold there was a throne set in Heaven, and One sat upon the throne, and He that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone." We are led up to the point at which some revelation seems imminent, and then St. John refrains. It is not for him to attempt to describe the indescribable. "No man hath seen God at any time."

It may be that for devotional purposes it has been our custom not to face this issue. Perhaps, deliberately, we have thought of God as our Heavenly Father, without making any attempt to conceive Him, to realise Him, even to visualise Him. Far be it from me to criticise such restraint, but I cannot help feeling that some time we ought to try to probe this mystery of God.

There are some words of William Law, author of *The Serious Call*, which are suggestive:

"With the self-same certainty as you know that you think, and are alive, you know that there is

BELIEF IN GOD

Goodness, Love, Benevolence, Meekness, Compassion, Wisdom, Peace, Joy, etc.

“Now this is the self-evident God, that forces Himself to be known and found and felt in every Man, in the same certainty of self-evidence as every man feels and finds his own thoughts and life.”

William Law thus suggests to us—as a beginning—what might be called an “impersonal” idea of God; we may think of Him in terms of excellence—seeing “God” in the best things. And indeed we have high Biblical authority for following this line. St. John says that “God is spirit,” justifying the first Article of Religion, which speaks of Him as without body, parts or passions; he also says that “God is light” and that “God is love.” Bishop Westcott has a very pertinent comment upon St. John’s saying that “God is light.” He writes:

“In each region of being, light represents the noblest manifestation of that energy to which it is applied; physically light embodies the idea of splendour and glory; intellectually of truth; morally of holiness.”⁴

Whether by design or coincidence the Bishop refers to the trinity of beauty, truth and goodness, which still remain for many people things of absolute value. (We may suggest that the words “God is love” are an amplification of the truth that God is goodness, implied in the saying “God is light.”)

THIS IS OUR FAITH

God, then, *is* these things; and in seeing Him in all beauty, truth and goodness, we reach, at least, an impersonal conception of God, which only a few eccentric or vicious persons can deny; and, as the late Bishop Gore said, "If this belief, i.e. the recognition in the world of spiritual qualities and values with which we are called to co-operate, and which we are moved to worship —if this belief and the accompanying worship is no more than pantheism, let us at least be pantheists." Most cordially do I applaud that sentiment. If we can form the habit of seeing God in all beauty, truth and goodness, whenever we encounter these, we shall be helped thereby to a constant recollection of Him.

*The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains—
Are not these, O Soul, the Vision of Him Who reigns?*

• • • • •

*And the ear of man cannot hear, and the eye of man cannot see;
But if we could see and hear, this Vision—were it not He?⁵*

It has been said by Dr. W. Temple that:

"When the deepest forms of æsthetic apprehension are reached the mood of the apprehending mind is more of reverence than enjoyment."⁶

Sincere admiration of beauty is a form of worship.

BELIEF IN GOD

And as it is with beauty, so it is with truth. Any manifestation of truth (and the stream has been in spate during this century) may be to us a manifestation of God.

So with goodness. As the late Dr. Illingworth once said: "To love goodness is in fact to love God." "He that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him." So that "the atheist who lives by love is saved by his faith in the God Whose existence (under that name) he denies."

Moreover, if anyone desires weighty authority for this initial way of conceiving God, it may be found in the report of the Lambeth Conference of 1930. There it is said that: "We must school ourselves to include in our habits of thought about the Creator God as much as we can of the beauty and order of the world, and of everything in life that evokes the awe, the loyalty and the self-sacrifice of men and women at their best."⁷

There are many people in the world who wish to believe in God and find themselves unable to do so; and among them are those who have no other idea of God than of some great person sitting upon a throne in heaven, supervising the universe. Moreover, to think of God in terms of personality seems sometimes to them to involve a contradiction, as if it were to reduce God to the level of "a being" in the universe. To such

THIS IS OUR FAITH

people it may be a real help to learn that the thought of God manifest everywhere as beauty, truth and goodness, is wholly legitimate. This may be a path along which they can be led to a fuller and more satisfying conception of Him.

For valuable though the impersonal idea of God may be, both to believers and to those who would describe themselves as agnostics, it does not fully meet the human need. Let me quote Bishop Gore again: "This natural religion is to most of us a very unsatisfactory religion. It suggests urgent questions, e.g. 'Is this God personal? While I seek to know Him does He know me and love me and respond to me?'" Similarly the late Lord Balfour in his Gifford Lectures, said that he wished to proclaim a God who "takes interest in the affairs of men: sides with right against wrong: and is no mere conclusion of a logical line of thought, but a living person."

Now it is at this point that some people find themselves in difficulty. How can they associate personality with one Who is described as infinite? Does not personality involve limitations which do not consort readily with infinity? Perhaps, in reply, it may be right to say that personality is an unideal word to employ in reference to God; but what is meant by it, and what all will be ready to concede, is that as there is something much greater than power—as a child, for example,

BELIEF IN GOD

is much greater than the Niagara Falls—so it would be absurd to conceive of God as only force; lacking knowledge, will, purpose, and affection, which even we possess. In fact we feel sure that we must speak about God as “He” and not as “It”.

But there is another answer to the difficulty. It is given by Lotze. He says: “In point of fact we have little cause for speaking of the personality of finite beings. It is an ideal, and like all that is ideal, belongs unconditionally only to the infinite. Perfect personality is in God only, and to finite minds there is allotted but a pale copy thereof. The finiteness of the finite is not a producing condition of this personality, but a limit and hindrance to its development.”⁸

Must we then say that it is only of God Himself that we can really predicate personality, and that personality in ourselves is but a partial reflection of personality in Him?

*On earth the broken arcs;
In the Heaven a perfect round.⁹*

Let us proceed to consider some of the grounds of our belief in God the Father Almighty.

(1) It is remarkable that throughout the Bible no attempt is made to argue in favour of belief in God. From the very first verse of the first book God is assumed—“In the beginning God

THIS IS OUR FAITH

created the heaven and the earth.” Indeed, there must be very few passages in Scripture in which anything in the nature of an argument for God’s existence is even suggested. There is a verse in the first chapter of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans in which allusion is made to the argument from nature: “For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even His everlasting power and divinity, that they may be without excuse.” This passage, however, is quite exceptional, possibly unique.

The fact to which I have now alluded is suggestive. It seems almost to imply that belief in God must be intuitive. “The real proof (of the existence of God) is of the nature of a valid inference, and it falls short of demonstration.” We believe in Him because we feel sure that He must be. “The number of instances in which a man becomes in a living sense religious because he has been convinced by argumentation must be extremely small.”

At the same time reasons for belief are not without their value. While it is doubtful whether anyone could be argued into belief, the arguments may take an unbeliever some way along the true path—although not to the goal. They will also strengthen and fortify the faith of those who believe on other grounds. Let us then consider

BELIEF IN GOD

some of the reasons which we have for believing in God.

I say "believing in God" rather than believing in gods. For polytheism, which has been common enough in religious history, and of which there are manifest traces in the Old Testament, is really an anachronism. "The science of nature has demonstrated the absolute unity of nature." The universe is one, and God, if there be God, is one only. The very idea of God, the supreme being, logically excludes the idea of many Gods. It is not necessary to spend time in disproving polytheism or dualism.

Let me suggest an illustration from astronomy which is, I think, pertinent and serviceable. The story is well known of the discovery of the planet Neptune, which until a few years ago, when Pluto was discovered, was believed to be the outermost planet of our solar system. The discovery of Neptune has been described as one of the crowning triumphs in mathematical astronomy. The story must be retold in the words of an astronomer:

"After the discovery of Uranus, tables of his journey round the sun were prepared, but it was found that he did not keep time. First he was too soon, then he was too late, now he was punctual, now too early again. These

THIS IS OUR FAITH

disagreements attracted attention; and the conclusion come to was that there must be a disturbing body somewhere. About the year 1845 two astronomers, hitherto unknown to fame, one Adams of Cambridge, the other Leverrier of Paris, independently entered on a laborious calculation about this disturbing body. The result was a planet was discovered at last only one degree, i.e. two diameters of the Moon's disc, from the place in the sky they assigned to it by their calculations. This planet was Neptune.”¹⁰

What happened can be very briefly stated. Uranus was not keeping to his proper path; a phenomenon which demanded explanation. An assumption was made that there must be some hitherto unknown planet, the attraction of which was affecting the orbit of Uranus. This assumption was tested by the mathematicians, and it was found that it would account for the observed phenomenon. Eventually it was verified, when through their telescopes the astronomers discovered Neptune.

It will be seen that there are four chapters in this story:

- (1) Certain facts have to be explained.
- (2) An assumption is made which, if true, might account for the facts.

BELIEF IN GOD

(3) The assumption is tested and is seen to be justifiable.

(4) Verification comes with experience.

Let me now apply this process of argument to the question of Belief in God.

(1) There are facts which need explanation, such as the existence of the universe, the order, and wonder, and beauty of creation, life, man, and man's mind and conscience—and so forth.

(2) We make the assumption of a personal God, all-powerful and all-holy. Could the facts be explained if this assumption were correct?

(3) We test it and see.

(4) Finally, God is verified in the experience of believers.

It seems to me that when we consider the grounds of our belief in God, we may follow this course of reasoning.

(1) It will not be disputed that there are facts within our knowledge and experience which demand explanation, and yet may not be immediately and easily explicable. For example the universe itself, of which it has been said that it is "too significant to be anonymous." There seems to be no alternative to belief in creation except a negative agnosticism. Mr. T. H. Huxley says, "It appears to me that scientific investigation is wholly incompetent to say anything at all about the first origin of the material universe. The

THIS IS OUR FAITH

whole power of his organon vanishes when he has to step beyond the chain of natural causes and facts. No form of nebular hypothesis that I know of is necessarily connected with any view of the origination of the nebular substance.”¹¹

But no thoughtful person can be satisfied with the statement contained in this quaint verse:

*The earth's a lot of dust
The sky's a lot of air,
The sea's a lot of water,
That happened to be there.*

And when Napoleon confronted his officers, who had been arguing for atheism, with the starry sky, and the words—“You are very clever, gentlemen, but who made all that?” he was asking a question to which the scientists seem to be increasingly ready to offer some answer. It was Lord Kelvin who said: “Science is compelled to accept the idea of creative power.” He writes: “There is nothing between absolute scientific belief in a creative being and the acceptance of the theory of the fortuitous concurrence of atoms. If you think strongly enough you will be forced by science to the belief in God which is the foundation of all religion.”

And in our own day Sir James Jeans has said: “There must have been what we may describe as a ‘creation’ at a time not infinitely remote.”¹²

BELIEF IN GOD

At least it will be agreed that some explanation of the existence of the universe is desirable, and unless we assume the eternity of matter (which seems to be deprecated by Sir James Jeans) we cannot do with less than Lord Kelvin's "creative power."

"However far back science may be able to push its beginning, there still must be behind that beginning the original act of creation."

Then we have to account for natural processes; the force of gravitation, the growth of plants, and the like; and merely to speak of these as "nature" or to talk of "natural law" is to evade the issue. It has always seemed to me that when anyone says, for example, that the movement of the planets is determined by natural law, he is stating what is precisely the opposite of the truth. Rather should he say that the natural law is determined by the movements of the planets. The planets, in fact, move; and, from observation of their actual movements, what is called "natural law" is deduced. But to imply that the law causes them to move would be as sensible as to suggest that Bradshaw causes the movements of the trains. No doubt the planets move because, having begun to move, they "naturally" continue to move unless something occurs to stop them; but this does not explain the fact of their movement. So it is with the growth of a plant. The

THIS IS OUR FAITH

fact is so universal that we lose sight of its wonder. At least some explanation is needed of the fact that a variety of seeds, sown in the same soil, watered by the same rain, and warmed by the same sun, not only emerge from the ground in the form of plants, but in the form of plants that differ so greatly from each other in structure and appearance. This is so usual an occurrence that we tend to overlook its wonder. But it should always be borne in mind that a phenomenon is not less wonderful because of its frequent occurrence; nor has it been explained because it seems to us to be a matter of course.

In a general way, the order and beauty of the universe seem to provide incontestable evidence of mind and purpose, i.e. of a Being endowed with mind and purpose. It is said that Mr. T. H. Huxley once committed himself to the statement that if six monkeys were set opposite six typewriters and went on tapping the keys for an infinitely long time, they would eventually produce all the books in the British Museum. I have not verified the story, but it is difficult to believe that any man of science would commit himself to so absurd a statement. Dr. Inge has said: "The theory of an automatic blind origin of the universe . . . is not logically impossible, but it is so wildly improbable that it is quite safe to disregard it. Does anyone really think that

BELIEF IN GOD

printers' pie might be shaken up till 'Hamlet' emerged?"¹³

To put the matter quite bluntly, the wonders of the natural order make it impossible to believe that a chance play of unintelligent force has sufficed to produce the world as we know it.

In the past, the appearance of life on this planet has appeared to demand a special creative act, because there is at present no known instance of life ever appearing independently of antecedent life. The principle *omne vivum ex vivo* has been maintained. It would not be wise, however, to depend upon the permanence of this principle. To quote Dr. Inge again: "Whether the old canon *omne vivum ex vivo* will continue to be accepted is not for me to predict; it seems to me very improbable. The gap between living and non-living has, I believe, been very nearly closed." By many people it is considered likely that life may eventually be made to appear from apparently lifeless substances; and, as has been said, if people live in gaps their position is apt to be unpleasant when the gaps close. But if the chemists should be successful and the gap should close we shall still ask the question "Whence did these substances derive the power to generate life?"

When we come to consider man and his mental powers we seem driven to the belief that God means not power only but mind. Dr. Temple

THIS IS OUR FAITH

writes: "The occurrence of minds within the world-process is evidence that the process itself is grounded in mind." And again: "How utterly impossible it is that mind should owe its origin to what is not mind. Sir James Jeans writes a book to describe the Mysterious Universe, but he is himself quite as mysterious as all that he describes, and nothing is so mysterious as the fact that he can describe it."¹⁴

Even more does the fact of man's conscience, his sense of right and wrong, and his invariable approval of whichever course he conscientiously believes to be right (although conscience, as in St. Paul's case, may make mistakes) seem to carry us to a point at which we have no alternative but to believe that what we call God is not merely power and wisdom, but One who has the supreme attribute of holiness. To imagine that the saints, with their vivid apprehension of duty and of God, are the result, so to speak, of so much horse-power, requires an act of faith at least as great as is required of those who believe in God.

So there are certain facts—the existence of the universe itself, its wonder and beauty, life, mankind endowed with mind and conscience—there are these facts which demand explanation; and surely no one will be permanently satisfied with the agnostic failure to offer any explanation. "Man wants to know, and when he ceases to want

BELIEF IN GOD

to know, he will cease to be man." In the face of these great questions to say "we do not know" is to file our petition in bankruptcy.

(2) So we make an assumption. We assume God, a Being perfect in power, wisdom and love. Let it be agreed that at first—seeing that we have no proof—God must be an assumption. We make the assumption in order to account in some way for the facts.

(3) Then we must test this assumption; as the astronomers tested their assumption of a planet moving outside the orbit of the planet Uranus. And when we test it, it does seem to be capable of accounting for the facts as no other assumption could. For if by God we mean what the first Article of Religion says, it is not unreasonable to believe that He willed existence of the universe (not creating it "out of nothing"—a statement which appears to have no meaning—but out of Himself) giving concrete expression to His thought; while if He is infinite wisdom it will not surprise us to find in nature all those marvels of which, as time goes on, mankind becomes increasingly conscious. The last half-century has been a time of exceptional revelation of the wonders of nature, but it would be foolish to suppose that revelations as great do not lie ahead.

Once more, if God is of infinite goodness, and

THIS IS OUR FAITH

if in some sort man is made in the image of God, we have an explanation of the phenomenon of conscience—that faculty which distinguishes between good and evil and invariably pronounces for the course which has been approved as good. May it not then be claimed that the assumption of God would account for facts which demand explanation, and for which no other adequate explanation is available?

(4) Then, finally, as the astronomers could not be utterly sure about Neptune until they had pointed their telescopes to that part of the heavens in which the mathematicians said that Neptune might be found, and had seen the planet, so, after the assumption of God has been tested and has stood the test, it needs verification in experience. It was once said that if, passing along the banks of a canal, you were to see a man's hat and coat, and find a letter in which the owner of these declared himself to be tired of life and anxious to end it all, you would have a strong presumption that he had drowned himself in the canal. But you would only know that to be the case when you had dragged the canal and found the body. Your reasonable assumption must be verified.

The verification of God in experience is reached when, in thought and prayer and sacrament, we become conscious that He is and knows and

BELIEF IN GOD

cares. "Be still then, and know that I am God."

To a later chapter must be deferred some further consideration of ways in which that experience of God which convinces believers may be attained.

In this clause of the Apostles' Creed God is spoken of as the Father. Many years ago, Bishop James Moorhouse, successively Bishop of Mel bourne and Manchester, a man of great learning and power, wrote an essay in which he argued that the "master thought" of Christ's teaching was the declaration of the Fatherhood of God. It is, of course, true that in pre-Christian days the word "Father" had been used by the Psalmists and prophets "to denote the pitifulness of the Lord God of Israel," but the use of the term was not felt to be incompatible with the attribution to God of qualities not rightly associated with the idea of true Fatherhood. After our Lord had come, the term "Father"—in Bishop Moorhouse's words—"not only became a name for God, but the name, almost the exclusive name by which, in future, He was to be known."

Repeatedly in the Sermon on the Mount, the idea of Divine Fatherhood is enunciated.

It must follow that if this be indeed the master thought of Christ's teaching, the doctrine will

THIS IS OUR FAITH

become a standard by which particular doctrines must be tested. Nothing can be of faith which is incompatible with the true doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood.

It is indeed a tragic fact—but one which must not be overlooked—that there are in the world many children to whom the true nature and character of God can hardly be revealed in terms of fatherhood, because of their own bitter experience.

CHAPTER III

(3) DIFFICULTIES OF BELIEF

*And I smiled to think God's greatness
Flows around our incompleteness—
Round our restlessness, His rest.*

E. B. BROWNING

HAVING thus considered some of the grounds of our belief in God, we must now face the fact that there are difficulties in the way of belief; and although any adequate discussion of these would serve as material for a whole volume, I must touch upon a few of those which are most commonly felt.

(a) *The problem of evil.* “The very fact that evil is felt to be a problem, even by many of those who avow no theistic faith, is evidence of the natural tendency of the mind to seek some explanation of the world in other terms than those of purely efficient causation.”¹ It is most significant that while we speak of a problem of evil, no one speaks of a problem of good. Or rather—as the late Dr. Streeter said—the problem of evil *in the world as we know it* should not present insuperable difficulty to an honest man; for freedom of choice between alternative good and bad is part of the endowment of a human being.

THIS IS OUR FAITH

On the scientific side there seems to be much more to be said for freedom than might have been conceded fifty years ago. As Sir James Jeans wrote in *The Mysterious Universe*, science "has no longer any unanswerable arguments to bring against our innate conviction of free will."² That innate conviction is surely a fact. Whatever arguments may be used to prove that we must choose the course which in fact we do choose, we believe ourselves to be free. If a man tells a deliberate lie, he knows in his heart that it was deliberate and that he might have spoken the truth. But granted at least that measure of human freedom, we can see that the evil in the world is almost entirely traceable to man's misuse of his gift of choice. Remembering that evil rather than good constitutes "news" to the press, take any newspaper at random and observe what is reported of evil. I dare say that in almost every case you will find that the evil has resulted from somebody's choice of evil—i.e. from misuse of the good gift of freedom. Mrs. Browning speaks of:

hard social questions

*Nay, impossible social questions, since their root
Lies deep in evil's own existence here,
Which God permits, because the question's hard
To abolish evil nor attain free will.³*

What really seems to constitute the problem

BELIEF IN GOD

of evil is that there should be evil to choose; but evil may have become an actual fact long before the creation of human beings, through their misuse of freedom by other created spirits. But that only dates and does not solve our problem. Is it the case that the possibility of evil is inevitably bound up with the bestowal of freedom upon creatures? Perhaps we can say no more than this.

But if anyone is inclined to suggest that, in view of the disasters consequent on such misuse, it were better that God's creatures had not been endowed with freedom—i.e. had been so constituted that they could only do the right—we are at once faced with another difficulty. If there is no possibility of doing "wrong," there can be no merit in doing "right." Compulsory virtue is not virtue at all. It would seem, therefore, that the price which has to be paid for virtue in the world as we know it, is the possibility of vice. And if that be so, it would be cowardly to blame God for what is really our fault. He endowed us with the faculty which alone makes virtue possible; and, by misuse of this faculty, we—and not He—make evil a fact. So that, *in the world as we know it*, evil always seems to me to raise a social rather than a theological problem. Nor can we seriously expect that God will constantly intervene to prevent the occurrence of evil. I dare say that we all feel sympathy with MacDuff

THIS IS OUR FAITH

who, when he heard that his children had been murdered, cried out: "Did heaven look on and would not take their part?" And yet if God were always to prevent the consequences of man's choice of evil, moral responsibility would be at an end.

In the Old Testament the problem is dramatically faced in the book of Job. The Book of Job is in fact a dramatic poem dealing mainly with one aspect of the problem of evil, viz. suffering. It may have an historical basis but it is clearly not an historical book. Its conclusion is mainly negative. Job is a good man but suffers great adversities of fortune. The popular theory, when the book was written, was evidently the theory that suffering was the immediate penalty of sin and that if a man suffered, clearly he must have sinned or he would not suffer. The writer of the Book of Job, however, makes Job—a righteous man—to suffer, and so argues the question. Job's friends do not get beyond the traditional view and they explain to Job that he must have sinned; but Job asserts his innocence and persists in his assertion. His friends are not convinced. They have their theory and if the facts do not fit the theory, so much the worse for the facts. Job, however, clearly reached the conclusion that the theory cannot stand. His conclusion is mainly a negative one. He demolishes the traditional idea and shows that it is untenable, but he has no

BELIEF IN GOD

complete solution to the problem with which to replace the tradition, and it is greatly to his credit that, in spite of strong temptation, he will not renounce God. He feels sure that there must be a solution, though he cannot suggest what it is; although gradually he moves towards the conviction that at last the injustices which weigh upon him now will be righted and God will vindicate his servant.

(b) Somewhat distinct from the problem of evil is the problem of pain. It is quite true that pain is generally caused by human folly or wrong doing—is, in fact, the fruit of sin—but that is not always the case. And at times we must all have echoed the enquiry—

*How can it be that (God)
Would make a world and keep it miserable
Since if all-powerful He leaves it so
He is not good,
And if not powerful
He is not God.⁴*

Probably the severest trial to faith is the extent and incidence of human suffering, physical and mental. What can we say in face of this problem?

To be strictly honest we must (it seems to me) eliminate the suffering which is caused by sin, for that is man's fault. If one man strikes another man on the head and causes him suffering, the man, and not God, is to blame.

THIS IS OUR FAITH

And if anyone should ask "Why is there such a thing as pain?" or in other words "Why, if I hit my brother on the head, does he suffer?" it is pertinent to point out the value and use of pain. I can recall a case in my parochial experience in which inability to feel pain by a sick woman led to disastrous results. She was ill and in bed, and those who were looking after her, with the best intentions, put a very hot water bottle in the bed. Owing to her malady one leg was entirely insensible to pain, and it came in contact with the hot water bottle, with the result that severe damage was done to the leg without, at the time, the patient's knowledge. Such a curious experience indicates the prophylactic value of pain. If inadvertently you touch a hot iron, immediately you withdraw your hand, *because of the pain*, before serious damage is done. There is a fable about a blacksmith who prayed that the fire might not burn his fingers, and as a result of having his prayer answered, found his hand charred to the bone. He had not noticed, because he had felt no pain, that the fire had destroyed his hand. Pain compels attention to the disturbance or malady with which it is associated, and supplies a powerful motive for avoiding any further action which may have similar painful consequences. "Once bitten twice shy."

When a doctor is diagnosing a disease, one of

BELIEF IN GOD

his first tasks is to enquire whether the patient is in pain, and where the pain is felt. Locating the pain often enables him to discover and treat the malady. If no pain were felt the mischief would proceed undetected, until a fatal result ensued. Indeed, one might conjecture that but for the fact of pain the human race might well have perished long ago. It is also significant that when we have suffered some injury involving pain, the treatment which is most likely to relieve the pain is also the most likely to repair the injury. To keep a wounded limb still will both relieve the pain and cure the wound.

I do not claim that such considerations solve the problem of pain, but I do claim that they are relevant.

Moreover, it cannot be denied that hardship in some form or other may prove the material out of which a strong character is formed. As Browning says: "Where pain ends, gain ends too." Or again (to quote the same writer):

*Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joy three-parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!*⁵

Of the Master Himself it was said that He was "made perfect through suffering."⁶ We look

THIS IS OUR FAITH

forward to a time when there will be no more pain, nor sorrow; but meantime suffering can be used to perfect courage, patience, sympathy, and other Christian virtues. Moreover, when we are thinking of the value of suffering and pain we are bound to ask ourselves how *evil* could be used as the raw material of good, if goodness were not really supreme.

Having said so much I am free to admit that I have not even to my own satisfaction met the difficulty. Sometimes excessive pain, and its incidence, seem to postulate a problem that is, at present, beyond our capacity to solve. Indeed, it may be that for the development of trust, things which are past our understanding are permitted, while we are, so to speak, on probation.

Finally, it is significant that we are disturbed by the “problem of evil” but never by the “problem of good.” Nothing could more forcibly signify our conviction that the fundamental nature of the universe is good. It is not good, in fact, that needs explanation, but evil.

And if we are sincere, we shall agree that the good in the world exceeds the evil. Observe the average day of an average man, and you will conclude that he spends far more time in doing right than in doing wrong.

This is true also of physical evil—of suffering.

BELIEF IN GOD

At any given time the vast majority of people in the world are not ill nor in pain.

Moreover, when Lord Tennyson wrote of "Nature red in tooth and claw with ravine," he was surely guilty of exaggeration, for it should be borne in mind that, in their natural state, the careless happiness of creatures far exceeds their unhappiness. Sir Ray Lankester, in one of his books, asserted that every disease to which animals are liable, except as a transient and very exceptional occurrence, was due to human interference.

And all these problems of evil should be viewed by the Christian in the light of what is coming—against the background of eternity. As St. Paul says, "Our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."⁷

In Bernard Shaw's play *St. Joan*, when the Maid appears after her death, she is asked "Did it hurt?" and answers "What?" "Being burnt." Then her reply is "Oh, that"—as if the actual pain of her martyrdom had now become quite insignificant in her memory.

(c) Another difficulty, which has often perplexed believers, is presented by the occurrence of natural disasters, such as earthquakes, volcanoes, devastating hurricanes, floods, and the failure of crops—with possible starvation for great numbers of people.

THIS IS OUR FAITH

Indeed, though the witness of nature seems on the whole to favour belief in a beneficent deity, there are certain phenomena in which it is extremely difficult to see the expression of the will of an all-loving and holy Father. For example, in his book *Africa View*, Mr. Julian Huxley writes:

“I got a photograph of a large caterpillar still crawling about, though covered with the white cocoons of ichneumon flies; and therefore eaten out inside to little more than a walking shell—another horrible product of nature’s amorality; confutation in itself of all the sentimentalism about a purposeful and beneficent creator.”

Similar illustrations are not far to seek. Farmers know the life-story of the warble fly, which is a plague to cattle; and there is, I believe, a certain wasp which stings and paralyses a beetle, and then deposits its larvæ in the body of the still living and helpless creature. How can these things be accounted for if an entirely good God rules our natural order? This is another question to which it is impossible to give any complete and satisfactory answer. In attempting to say something which may ease the pressure of the problem, I must first point out what has already been briefly indicated, namely that if God be

BELIEF IN GOD

denied, then there is no explanation of the astonishing beauty and wonder and beneficence of nature. If there are difficulties sometimes in belief, no escape from these difficulties can be found in unbelief. Indeed it seems to me to be far easier to believe in a creator God, who is good, but whose work has in certain respects been marred, than to have to attribute the dawn and the sunset, the majesty of the mountains, the splendour of the sea and the intricate marvels of nature whereby man is sustained in body, mind and spirit, to blind force.

But to return to the problem. The conclusion which I cannot evade is that in nature something must have happened which is, in some degree, comparable to "the Fall" in man. Man is made in the image of God; but he is fallen. The best man is a fallen man. The tragedy has happened and continues to happen day by day. Human nature in the mass is evidently not what God meant it to be. And in the New Testament there is one passage—which stands alone—in which St. Paul seems to hint that in sub-human nature something has happened which one might speak of as a "Fall." He says "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now"; and he speaks of the hope "that the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of

THIS IS OUR FAITH

God.”⁸ If this hint seems to be too vague I must plead that it is hard to be explicit; but I will indulge in speculation. In this astonishing universe, besides human beings and the creatures with which we are familiar, there may be, for all we know, myriads of created beings, of whom we have little or no knowledge. Our Lord certainly gives strong support to belief in angels, both good and bad. May it not be that such beings have some power in directing the course of nature—there is Biblical support for this view—and that among them the rebellious spirits have caused these scars upon nature’s face, although their influence is but partial, and their triumph far from complete. There is a remarkable passage in the Book of the Revelation, in which we read that, during the judgment of the trumpets, a *third part* of the earth, and of the trees, and of the green grass, was burnt up, and the *third part* of the rivers and the fountains became bitter.⁹ The words seem to suggest that a disaster has occurred, but one which is strictly limited. The balance is on the right side; as everyone will admit who looks fairly at nature, and heeds its prevailing witness. And one day the redemption of the creation, as of man, from the tyranny of evil, will be complete, when there shall be “a new heaven and a new earth.”¹⁰

(d) On one other of the difficulties of belief I

BELIEF IN GOD

will briefly touch. In some respects it is the greatest of all, but the remedy is in our own hands. I refer to the inconsistent lives of so many professing Christians. The objection, on this account, to religion is not really valid, but it is effectual. Some man who is known to be a Christian by profession, possibly one of the inner circle, is living a life which belies his Christian calling, and the onlooker says—quite illogically—“If this is religion I don’t want it.” Obviously the answer is that it is not religion, but a denial of religion, and that Christianity should be judged for what it is, and not by the lives of those who only profess and call themselves Christians, and do not practise their religion. And yet there can be no doubt that one whose life contradicts his professed belief is in fact capable of doing immense harm to the cause of Christ. “Religion itself, when developed to real maturity, knows quite well that the first object of its condemnation is bad religion, which is a totally different thing from irreligion, and can be a very much worse thing.” The remedy here is simple and straightforward. It is suggested by St. Peter, who warns those to whom he is writing to have their behaviour “seemly among the Gentiles, that wherein they speak against you as evil doers, they may by your good works which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”¹¹

THIS IS OUR FAITH

No one will wish to suggest that it is quite easy to believe in God. I have only touched on some of the chief difficulties with which, as believers, we are faced; but as I close this chapter, I would wish to reiterate what I have already indicated, that the difficulties of unbelief far exceed the difficulties of belief. It is only the thoughtless man who supposes that if he finds it hard to believe in God he will escape difficulties by lapsing into agnosticism. At least in perplexity and confusion of thought the last state of that man will be worse than the first.

CHAPTER IV

(4) ALTERNATIVES TO BELIEF

*All we have gained then by our unbelief
Is a life of doubt diversified by faith
For one of faith diversified by doubt:
We called the chess-board white—we call it black.*

ROBERT BROWNING

It seems fitting, before leaving the subject of belief in God, to consider certain alternatives to belief. If a man is unable or unwilling to believe, what is left for him?

I will indicate three possibilities. There are:

- (a) Atheism—the doctrine that there is no God.
- (b) Agnosticism—which represents the position of those who say “we don’t know,” and
- (c) Indifference—“We don’t care.”

Other alternatives such as rationalism, materialism, secularism and the like seem generally to be forms of atheism or of agnosticism or of indifference. Let me deal briefly with the three.

(a) *Atheism.* Atheism, I dare say, is very rarely professed. Some years ago I took upon myself to enquire of some leading men whether they had ever encountered atheism in the strict sense of the term—i.e. whether they had ever met men who denied the existence of God. Their

THIS IS OUR FAITH

teplies indicated that while agnosticism was very common, atheism, in that sense, was exceedingly rare. The word is defined in the dictionary as meaning "disbelief in the existence of God." Observe that the term used is "disbelief" and not "unbelief." Disbelief signifies belief that a thing is not, whereas unbelief signifies failure to believe that it is. The two points of view are quite distinct.

In a book of essays which appeared under the title of *An Agnostic's Apology*, the late Mr. Leslie Stephen wrote: "Dogmatic atheism—the doctrine that there is no God, *whatever may be meant by God*—is to say the least a rare phase of opinion." Similarly a writer in an annual report of the Rationalist Press Association said: "We are not, of course, committed by our acceptance of reasoning or science to a denial that there is no deity; but we are committed to proving it if we assert that there is."

There is much significance in Mr. Leslie Stephen's phrase "The doctrine that there is no God—*whatever may be meant by God*." For, as I have already indicated, our conception of God should be widely inclusive. "God is light", "God is love," and no man who acknowledges the absolute value of beauty or truth or goodness can properly call himself or be called an atheist. "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God."¹

BELIEF IN GOD

It is recorded that a prominent member of the Russian Church was being tried, presumably for professing or teaching Christianity. When he was asked about his defence he declared that "he had trust in God." Then—so the description of the trial proceeds—"the Soviet promptly denied the existence of God." Of course that might be called atheism; but, for my part, if I were to bring a charge of atheism against the judges in such a trial it would not be only on the ground that they had denied the existence of a supernatural being in whom the prisoner put his trust, but rather that they had showed themselves merciless to their opponents, that they denied justice, pity and liberty. That is the real "atheism," not merely the denial of God, but the denial of good.

It is not, therefore, surprising that even among those who rank themselves as "unbelievers" strict atheism is a rare phase of opinion.

(b) We come to agnosticism. While etymologically the word atheism suggests the theory that "there is no God," the word agnosticism defines the position of those who "do not know." One might express the difference in this way: To the proposition that "God is" the theist votes "Aye," the atheist votes "No," and the agnostic "Moves the previous question," i.e. he leaves the issue undecided. He says, "We do not know."

Many years ago, Mr. G. W. Foote and Mr.

THIS IS OUR FAITH

Holyoake were protagonists in a discussion on the subject of agnosticism. Mr. Foote said that the agnostic was only "the atheist with a tall hat on," which was his delicate way of asserting that there was no difference between the two, and that agnosticism was only the aristocratic form of atheism. Let me quote his own words—"Charles Bradlaugh was an atheist because he was a man of invincible courage, and did not care twopence for the frowns of the Church or the sneers of society. Professor Huxley was an agnostic because he had over £1,000 a year, and moved in the upper circles, and filled certain honourable positions."

This verdict was challenged by Mr. Holyoake, who was quite clear that if the words were to be given their proper meaning there was a difference between the two positions. "The atheist," he said, "declares that there is no such existence as that of a supreme cause of nature. The agnostic, more modest, simply says that having no information on the subject he does not know."

The term "agnosticism" appears to have been invented by Professor T. H. Huxley. He says that when he reached intellectual maturity he began to ask himself whether he were atheist, theist, pantheist, materialist, idealist, Christian, or what; and found that he disagreed with them all. "They were all sure that they had attained

BELIEF IN GOD

a certain knowledge or gnosis—had more or less successfully solved the problem of existence, while I was quite sure I had not, and had a pretty strong conviction that the problem was insoluble. So I invented what I considered to be the appropriate title of ‘agnostic’.”²

He adds that agnosticism is a method—the essence of which lies in the application of the principle “Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.”³

What shall we say of agnosticism? We must confess that in some degree we are all agnostics. There are many things which we must not expect to know on this side of the grave, things about which our Lord apparently was silent. As Dr. Carpenter has said, “The gospel is not an encyclopedia; our Lord is the way, the truth, and the life—not a map, or a crib, or a time-table.” The late Hugh Benson, speaking as a Roman Catholic, said: “A devout agnosticism must be an element in every creed.” St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Corinthians says: “Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face.” “Now I know in part.”⁴ Our Lord said: “Of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven.”⁵ It would be easy to give a catalogue of questions which most of us would eagerly ask, but to which no answers could be forthcoming.

But this need not unduly depress us. Is there

THIS IS OUR FAITH

any single department of knowledge in regard to which its professors know everything that might be known? Is it so in medicine, astronomy, chemistry, history, geology or elsewhere? Ask the professors certain questions and they will inevitably say: "We do not know"; but you will not find that on this account they abandon their studies; nor do the laity say of them: "Because you don't know these things we doubt whether you know anything." In every sphere, including the sphere of religion, "we know in part," which means that we do not know everything, but also means that we do know much.

But if your agnostic demands *proof*, as of a proposition in Euclid, before he will attempt any experience of religion, he is doomed to disappointment. Take the two great fundamentals—God and Immortality. Once a man realises that by God we mean One who is infinite, eternal, omnipresent, he must see that, from the nature of the case, no logical demonstration is possible. How could God be proved? It is sometimes said that seeing is believing, but in no way could anything be presented to our sense of sight (nor indeed to any other sense) which would demonstrate the eternal author of the universe. If the agnostic demands "proof" let us invite him to suggest the form which such proof should take. What does he ask? Does he ask that some glorious

BELIEF IN GOD

being should appear, seated upon a throne? Does he ask for miracles? What is it that he wants? I venture to say that no suggestion which he could possibly make would, if it could be carried out, afford any "proof" of God. It is no mere paradox to say that if God could be "proved" He would not be God.

So in regard to any proof of immortality. This too, must remain impossible. Conceivably there could be proof of survival; if one who had died came back to this earth, and we could with certainty identify him, we should have compelling evidence that he had survived the change of death; but this, of course, would be no proof of immortality. Immortality could never be proved, because you could only prove that a series was endless when it had shown itself to be endless, which, obviously, would be never. In fact, this demand for proof in the sphere of religion seems to involve a misconception of the nature of religion. The kind of proof that is demanded is as much out of place as would be an attempted judgment of the character of a man by weighing him in the scales, or of the sweetness of sugar by feeling its texture. These are not the appropriate tests in such cases; neither is "proof" appropriate in the matter of religion. What corresponds to proof in other spheres will be an assurance based upon experience. No mathematical proof, such

THIS IS OUR FAITH

as the agnostic demands, is possible; but love offers a tolerable analogy. The demand to prove that you love someone or are loved by him can never be met. What you can say, however, is: "I have evidence assuring me that it is so, and my assurance is based upon experience." And so it is with God. The agnostic must be ready to make that assumption of God of which I was speaking earlier in this book, to test it, and finally to verify it in experience. He must act as if God was, must seek Him in the beauty of the world, in the heroism and self-sacrifice of mankind. He must aim at religious experience:

*Speak to Him thou for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit
can meet,
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and
feet.⁶*

And at last he will find—not indeed such proof as he demanded, but the assurance of "Our Father in Heaven."

There is, in fact, in religious discipleship a necessary and inevitable agnosticism; but while the Christian freely admits this to be the case, he will insist that such agnosticism need not extend to the most fundamental and vital truths. It was said by a famous agnostic that "there are limits to the sphere of human intelligence" and that "theology lies within this forbidden sphere." My

BELIEF IN GOD

reply would be that the “forbidden sphere” (to borrow his term) is so to speak in the suburban districts, and that the great city of God itself lies open to wayfaring men, though fools. “And the Spirit and the Bride say ‘Come’.”⁷

In speaking of atheism and agnosticism I have had in mind the position of men and women who are thoughtful, who may have been led by reasoning to the negative conclusions which they have reached—and reached sometimes most unwillingly. I cannot forbear to quote a classic passage from the writings of the late George Romanes, during that agnostic period from which, happily, he recovered.

“I am not ashamed to confess that with this virtual negation of God the universe to me has lost its soul of loveliness; and although from henceforth the precept to ‘work while it is day’ will doubtless but gain an intensified force from the terribly intensified meaning of the words ‘the night cometh when no man can work’, yet when at times I think, as think at times I must, of the appalling contrast between the hallowed glory of that creed which once was mine, and the lonely mystery of existence as now I find it—at such times I shall ever feel it impossible to avoid the sharpest pangs of which my nature is susceptible.”⁸

THIS IS OUR FAITH

Knowing how weak at times our own faith may become, none of us will withhold the tribute of heartfelt sympathy from those who would believe and yet can reach no settled conviction.

(c) There are others, forming a more numerous class, who without serious thought or reason lapse into indifference. For them religion is crowded out. The cares of this world, the pursuit of riches, the search for sensation or excitement, so fill their lives that the claims of God are ignored. In fact, although their lot may be cast in a country in which Christianity has established certain most valuable traditions and conventions, they are living "without God in the world." It is a highly unsatisfactory position to assume; because, apart from God, it seems totally impossible to get any rational explanation of the meaning and purpose of human life; and for any sane man to live in this world, and make no attempt to grasp the meaning of life, is to assume an attitude utterly unworthy of humanity.

No man's life should be overcrowded with mundane cares, which are allowed to absorb his whole interest and concern. Moreover, although, while all goes well, he may find in secular life a measure of satisfaction, nothing can be more certain than that in darker days, and particularly when life appears to be drawing to a close, he will be left without resources, if his horizon has

BELIEF IN GOD

been bounded by the things that are seen. The people who leave religion on one side, or as they put it "have no use for religion," build their house upon the sand, and find that when the rain descends, and the floods come, and the winds blow and beat upon the house, it falls, because it is not founded upon the rock.

There would seem, then, to be no tolerable alternative to belief in God; and this being so, it behoves us to consider how we can strengthen our faith, which, as we have already seen, is a variable quality. At an earlier stage I suggested that while arguments are unlikely to convince the unbeliever (although they may take him some way along the path that leads to faith) they can fortify and strengthen the convictions of those who, possibly on other grounds, have learnt to believe. It is well, therefore, to devote some of our time to the study of books in which the reasons for belief in God are set out in orderly manner.

But those whose faith is strongest would surely testify that conviction has come to them through experience.

*Whoso bath felt the power of the highest,
Cannot confound or doubt Him or deny,
Yea, with one voice, O world, tho' thou deniest,
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.⁹*

THIS IS OUR FAITH

To have "felt the power" is to have an assurance which we can reach in no other way, and of which the most plausible arguments will not rob us. Let a thirsty man drink a glass of cold water, and no one will ever persuade him that the glass was empty.

To establish conviction, then, we should *act* with whatever faith we possess, augmenting it by exercise. The story of St. Thomas is most suggestive. After Easter Day he professed himself to be sceptical. He was the true agnostic. He did not absolutely deny that the Lord had risen, but he had no knowledge of the fact. Moreover, in characteristically agnostic manner, he demanded demonstration. He must put his finger into the print of the nails, he must thrust his hand into the Lord's side. So the days passed; and, on what we call Low Sunday, St. Thomas, who had been absent from the meeting of the Apostles on Easter Day, was present, perhaps with some slight expectation or hope. The feeble "five per cent" faith on which he acted at least took him where the Lord might be found, in the assembly of the faithful, on the first day of the week. Then experience established conviction. How irrelevant must have seemed to himself his declaration that nothing would convince him but physical contact with the Lord, and the assurance, by touch, of the Lord's identity! He did not need

BELIEF IN GOD

to put his finger into the print of the nails. The Lord was manifest, and he knew.

It is ever so. Those to whom God means most are not necessarily the people who can argue most convincingly for the theistic position. They are the people who have learnt, slowly perhaps, to pray their prayers. They are the people who in the united worship of the Church have at least learnt to restrain their wandering thoughts. They are the people to whom the Bible has spoken with a voice so authoritative—whether in rebuke or consolation—that in their hearts they acknowledge the Scriptures to be the Word of God. They are the people who are not only “regular communicants” but who in very deed eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood. There is no easy recipe for reality in our devotions, whether secret or corporate. Concentration is difficult; but when in any degree we become conscious of a real relationship to the One Who is present but unseen, we have an experience which deepens and establishes our assurance that God “is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.”¹⁰

A NOTE ON THE WORD “ALMIGHTY”

The word “Almighty” as it occurs in the Apostles’ Creed is so often misinterpreted that it seems worth while to append a note in explanation of its meaning.

Those who are old enough to recall the days of the Great War may remember how current were such expressions as “Why did God allow the war to happen?” “Why doesn’t God stop the war?” —and the like. The speakers would sometimes add: “He is almighty, therefore He could stop it. Why does He let it go on?”

Probably, from time to time, we all share the feelings which were thus expressed. We long for “something to be done”; and we think that surely God could take the necessary action if He would.

But it should be clearly understood that when we speak of God as “almighty” we do not mean that He can do anything that we can express in human language. There are some things which God “cannot” do, not for want of “ability,” but because such things are meaningless. God cannot make the surface of a wall black all over and white all over at the same time—because the very suggestion is nonsensical. We are assured in the New Testament that “it is impossible for God to

BELIEF IN GOD

lie.” He cannot contradict Himself; He cannot cause something to be and not to be at the same moment.

Therefore, it is not wise to interpret the word “almighty” as signifying “able to do anything.” In fact it translates a word which signifies “all sovereign—all powerful.” We may truly say that nothing is “too hard” for the Lord, but we might add that there are things which would be too absurd.

Now God has given to human beings the power of choice between good and evil. Faced with the alternatives of speaking the truth or telling a lie, a rational man is able to decide which course he will follow. This freedom is part of our humanity, and without it we should not be human beings. If, therefore, when anyone was about to choose the evil course God were to intervene and forcibly to prevent him from acting as he had willed to act, God would have robbed the man of his humanity. So far the man would have ceased to be a human being; and God, Who willed that man to be a human being, would have contradicted Himself—which He cannot do. It is impossible for a man to be at the same time a rational free human being, and a marionette, irresponsibly moved as some controlling power pulls the strings. There is no such thing, in fact, as forcing a free will. At one time I remember

THIS IS OUR FAITH

the question being asked, "Do you think the Government will introduce conscription?" to which the answer was given, "No, but I think they will compel every one to be a volunteer." The speaker apparently overlooked the fact that he was talking nonsense.

Human nature being what God has willed it to be, it is true to say that He "cannot" prevent evil; not because He is not strong enough, but because forcible constraint of a free being has no meaning.

It has sometimes been suggested—the point has already been mentioned—that, in view of the disastrous results of man's misuse of God's gift of freedom, it would have been better if we had been created without any power of choice. But where there is no freedom of choice there is no virtue.

Let me suppose the case of a parent who desires to make his child kind and generous. He gives the child a coin and bids him pass it on to some other child who is poor and destitute. His own child declines so to do. The parent then carries the child into the road, and finding some little boy who is obviously poorer than his own, forces open his child's hand in order that the coin may fall into the hand of the other. His own child's action in bestowing the coin has no merit whatever because he was compelled so to act. When there is no freedom there is no virtue. If a

BELIEF IN GOD

mother from the head of the stairs calls to her little girl in the hall to come up to bed, and the little girl refuses, the mother may descend the staircase, pick up the girl, and carry her to the bedroom; but her daughter has not "obeyed." Such illustrations may serve to guard us against the supposition that a world in which the inhabitants had no freedom would be an improvement upon the world as we know it; for it would be a world from which virtue had been banished.

The word "almighty," therefore, must not be interpreted as implying that God can do anything which we can put into words; and we must not make the fatal mistake of supposing that, because there is so much evil in the world—with so much consequent suffering—God is either unable or unwilling to heal and restore our poor distracted humanity.

*The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves.¹¹*

We are they who hinder the coming of His kingdom.

But the belief that God is indeed Almighty gives us the assurance that when, in any earnest efforts to serve mankind according to His will, we claim His help, we shall be enabled by a Power to which no limits can be set.

II
BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

CHAPTER V

I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD

*So it was when Jesus came in His greatness
With His divine compassion and great gospel of peace
Men hail'd Him word of God, and in the title of Christ
Crowned Him with love beyond all earth-names of renown.*

ROBERT BRIDGES: "The Testament of Beauty."

HITHERTO I have been dealing with the first part of the Creed—with our belief in "God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth"—and I have offered certain considerations in the hope that they might be of service in making belief to appear reasonable.

But these considerations hardly carry us to our goal. We may be justified, theoretically, in speaking of God as "Someone," as "personal," and yet be hampered in our devotional activity by failure thus to realise Him. Nor does modern knowledge appear—at first—to diminish the difficulty. In the mind of the ordinary man the scale of the universe has been enormously extended in recent years through astronomical discovery; and by means of books, and popular broadcasts to which men can listen in their own homes, these discoveries have become generally known. The

THIS IS OUR FAITH

Astronomer Royal for example, speaks of nebulae so far distant from our planet (and yet visible through a huge telescope) that their light takes 130 million years to reach us;¹ and light travels at the rate of 186,000 miles a second. Let anyone try to conceive the vastness of an universe in which there are two points, from one of which light starts on its very rapid journey at any given moment and reaches the other; travelling at 186,000 miles a second, only after the lapse of 130 million years.

It is utterly beyond our capacity to grasp these distances; and yet the one true God is—we believe—the creator and sustainer of all this universe, and directs the orderly movement of these celestial bodies. He is spoken of as “omnipresent”—at work on this earth, at work in that far distant nebula. By what means can a human being, confined to this tiny planet, conceive of so great a God? “Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.”²

Perhaps one should point out that, in the sphere of what is spiritual, considerations of space and distance are really irrelevant. When we try to think of God as omnipresent we do not mean that He is, so to speak, in 10,000 or 10 million places at once, but rather that He is not subject to spatial conditions. It might be equally true to say, that “God is everywhere,” and that “God is

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

nowhere,” meaning by the latter statement not that He does not exist, but that He is not located in any particular place.

But as we live in time and space, we need help to realise the infinite God. The late George Romanes once wrote: “The nearest approach which the human mind can make to a true notion of the *ens realissimum* is that of an inconceivably magnified image of itself at its best.”³ Does not this suggest to us what was in fact our Lord’s response to Philip’s plea: “Lord, show us the Father?” His answer was: “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.” In other words, in Jesus Christ, Who is the “image of the invisible God,” we have the most perfect revelation of God which our minds are capable of receiving.

I recall an occasion in my parochial experience when I was visiting a nurse who was ill; and in speaking of prayer I took occasion to ask her how she thought of God when she said her prayers. Her reply was: “I think of Him as someone like ourselves, only perfect. In fact, I think of Jesus Christ.”

“No man,” our Lord said, “cometh to the Father but by Me.”⁴

It will be enough to say that, when we try to realise God as “someone” nothing can help us more than the great truth taught by St. John, when he said: “In the beginning was the Word,

THIS IS OUR FAITH

and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”⁵

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So we are led to a consideration of the second part of the Creed—in which we are concerned with Jesus Christ our Lord, and with the great events to which the Creed refers—from His first to His second “Advent.” Herein we must begin with some thoughts about the doctrine of the Incarnation.

The word “Incarnation”—derived from the Latin word “caro” (Genitive “carnis”), which means flesh—is defined in the dictionary as signifying “the assumption of human flesh by the Second Person of the Trinity.” Strictly, the Festival of the Incarnation should be kept on March 25th, when to the Virgin Mary came the message that, with her consent and through the power of the Holy Spirit, she should be the mother of our Lord. It is natural, however, that we should think of the Incarnation especially at Christmas, when the Infant Jesus was born.

The truth is declared in the Nicene Creed, where, after reference to the Second Person of the Trinity, follow the words “Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

Virgin Mary, and was made man.” This assumption of human nature by the Second Person of the Holy Trinity is what is meant by the “Incarnation.”

The birth of Jesus Christ is an historical fact, denied only by a few wilful or eccentric people. It would not be sensible to spend time in confuting the wild statements of those few and not really significant people, who deny that Jesus Christ ever existed.

Jesus, then, was born of Mary nearly nineteen and a half centuries ago in Palestine.

The plain statement of the Church’s belief about Him is contained in the Athanasian Creed: “the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.”

(a) There have been occasions in the history of the Church in which His real humanity has been denied; but again it hardly seems necessary to spend time in combating that particular form of heresy, into which it is extremely unlikely that any of us would lapse. We must think in the main of our Lord’s deity, and it must be enough to say of His humanity that it is sinless and complete. The challenge which He gave: “Which of you convinceth me of sin?”⁶ does not appear to have been seriously taken up either at once or in later days. And when on the Cross He said “It

THIS IS OUR FAITH

is finished”—one word in the Greek—He pronounced a verdict on His own life (for we do not interpret the word as signifying merely “it is ended,” but “it is complete”), which is not contested by any but those whose interest it may be to belittle Him. Frederick Myers has expressed the general view:

*Whereinsoever breath may rise and die
Their generations follow on, and earth
Each in their kind replenisheth anew,
Only like him she bears not nor hath borne—
One in her endless multitude of men.⁷*

(b) We now address ourselves to the question whether we are justified in adopting the words which we use of Him in the Nicene Creed: “God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God.”

There can be little doubt of the verdict of the New Testament. It is quite clear that St. John identifies Jesus with the Word of God; and that he attributes deity to the Word—and thus to Jesus. But it has sometimes been supposed that it is *only* in St. John’s Gospel that this absolute deity of Jesus is taught; and, if the traditional authorship of St. John’s Gospel be denied, it is thought possible (on this supposition) to repudiate the idea that the “authentic” gospels present to us a Divine Christ. Such an argument, however, breaks down hopelessly. Leaving the question

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

of the authorship of St. John's Gospel—it may be true that not until after the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit was the deity of the Master fully accepted, even by the Apostles; but nevertheless there are statements and implications in the first three gospels which are wholly incompatible with the doctrine of a merely human Jesus.

In Dr. Temple's book, *Christus Veritas*, there is a chapter on the Godhead of Jesus Christ in which he traces the growth of the conviction of that Godhead in the minds of the first Christians. Inevitably, as he says, they began by thinking of their Master as a man; and yet from the first there was in Him something mysterious, the starting point for their fuller apprehension; e.g. strange things had been said about Him by John the Baptist; His teaching had a grace and an authority that was unique; His wonderful works exceeded previous experience. Gradually they came to acknowledge Him as more than human: as peculiarly the "Son of God," though not as yet as "God the Son." And while, at this stage, He said things which it would be difficult to reconcile with any theory of His merely human origin, His Divine claims were expressed in terms which hardly amounted to a dogmatic assertion. Indeed had He said explicitly "I am Jehovah," it is likely that He would have baffled and perplexed his

THIS IS OUR FAITH

hearers. They were Jews, with the Old Testament behind them, and it would certainly have needed more than a verbal claim to persuade them to accept such a declaration. Even in the first days after the coming of the Holy Spirit, e.g. when St. Peter preached the sermons recorded in the earlier chapters of the Acts, there is no explicit declaration that "Jesus is God," though at St. Stephen's martyrdom, the phrase "Lord Jesus receive my spirit" is a kind of "devotional equation" of Jesus with the God of the spirits of all flesh.⁸

When we come to St. Paul—whose first experience of Christ was not an experience of someone with whom he had walked and talked, but of One who suddenly appeared to him on the Damascus road in a dazzling vision—we find that gradually St. Paul came to use language which cannot have any other meaning than that Jesus Christ is God of God. Thus: "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."⁹ "He is the image of the invisible God."¹⁰ "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself."¹¹

It would be true also of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews to say that his argument demands the doctrine of the deity of Christ.

Finally, in St. John's writings the doctrine is explicitly stated, as e.g. in his general epistle and in the prologue to his gospel.

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

It would appear then that belief in the deity of Jesus Christ was something to which the first Christians found themselves driven by their growing spiritual experience. Indeed, had our Lord made an explicit declaration of His deity (if such a thing can be conceived of Him) such a declaration would have robbed the faith of the apostles of its spiritual value. It is not the case that a dogma was thrust upon them by authority; but rather that their ultimate belief represents a discovery based, as scientific truth must be based, upon experience. "I know whom I have believed."¹²

For the moment let us assume that belief in the Godhead of Jesus has been accepted. We are then faced with a question to which no complete answer can be given, the question, namely, of the reconciliation of the divine and human natures in the person of Christ. It is the prerogative of God to know, it is characteristic of man to have to learn. How can full knowledge and the need to acquire knowledge be united in one person? It may be best, in reply, to refer to St. Paul's doctrine of what is called the Kenosis. In the Epistle to the Philippians St. Paul writes (I give the translation of his words as it appears in the Revised Version): "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God counted it not a prize to be on an

THIS IS OUR FAITH

equality with God, but *emptied Himself* taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.”¹³

He “emptied” Himself.

It would appear that in order that His life might be a true human life, the Son of God, at the Incarnation, lays aside certain of the attributes of deity; so that, although we rightly speak of Him as God, we may well believe the words of Scripture in which it is said that “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”¹⁴

It may be possible to offer some further evidence of the Doctrine of our Lord’s Deity, in the form of answers to some of the difficulties with which would-be believers may feel themselves faced. For example: (a) It has been said that if Christ is indeed Very God of Very God, how is it that Christianity has not rapidly conquered the world? If Christ were divine, surely (it is argued) His religion would be irresistible.

But this argument fails to take account of the fact of human freedom. Even God cannot compel a will that is free; for that is a contradiction in terms; the Christian victory can only be won by consent, and where consent is withheld, victory tarries. (b) Again, it has sometimes been said that the doctrine of the Incarnation seems to

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

involve the undue importance of a particular event which took place at a particular time in the far-off past; and that this seems inconsistent with evolutionary ideas; that it implies a looking back instead of a looking forward. But we should not be so obsessed with the idea of evolution as to wish to apply the principle to every phase of experience, human and divine. There have, in fact, been great days in the past, classic moments in history and art, actions and achievements that have never been surpassed. A Madonna is not necessarily a stage in advancing evolution. "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." So it is with the Incarnation. It is not a valid argument to urge against it that it happened on a particular day so many centuries ago. Be it so. "God hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son."¹⁵

(c) But there is a difficulty which is more widely and acutely felt than those to which I have hitherto referred.

It is urged that we can hardly believe that God, the infinite and eternal, became incarnate in one little world. This might have been possible, they say, in the old days when our earth was supposed to be the centre of the universe; but not now; when we know that our earth is only one planet in one system, which is not the most important among the myriads of systems existing within

THIS IS OUR FAITH

that part of space of which we have any knowledge. The late Lord Balfour, in his Gifford Lectures, referred to this difficulty as arising from what he called "an aesthetic sense of disproportion." The disproportion is between the physical insignificance of our planet, and the tremendous event which it is said to have witnessed—the Incarnation of God. More recently, Sir James Jeans referred to the same difficulty. He said that at the first the Church upheld the Ptolemaic astronomy, and adds: "Indeed, it is difficult to see what else it could have done, for it seemed almost impious to suppose that the great drama of man's fall and redemption, in which the Son of God had Himself taken part, could have been enacted on any lesser stage than the very centre of the Universe."¹⁶

There is no doubt that this difficulty has been to some people a real hindrance to belief. But surely it need not cause us a moment's anxiety. Conditions of physical size are quite irrelevant when we consider a great spiritual act. May I quote some rather quaint words of the late Dr. Streeter: "A man's passion for his lady love takes up no more room in space than his affection for his great-aunt; the difference is one of intensity and quality, not size. The difference between the kind of disapprobation with which a fashionable undergraduate regards a man who wears the

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

wrong tie and that with which Christ viewed the Pharisees may be described as ‘world wide’—but that does not imply that it is one to which the diameter of the earth is in the smallest degree relevant.”¹⁷

We must not confuse our categories.

Moreover, God is, by hypothesis, infinitely good, and even if there were myriads of other inhabited worlds, and even if on none of them had God’s creatures erred and strayed, we believe that the Good Shepherd would have left the ninety and nine and gone after the one which was lost until he should find it.

In fact, God being infinite Love, the more amazing the condescension of the Incarnation the more likely it is to be true, not the more unlikely.

Having dealt very shortly with some of the difficulties of belief in this great truth, let me allude to some of the grounds upon which our faith therein may rest.

I have already referred to the documentary evidence; let me now go further.

(a) Self revelation is characteristic of personality. We are always revealing ourselves, from the cradle to the grave; and if God has personality, i.e. if there is in God that of which personality in ourselves is the reflection (and we cannot think of Him in any higher category than

THIS IS OUR FAITH

that of personality, and He cannot be less than we are) He, too, must reveal Himself. Moreover, this self-revelation of God must be in the best possible form; and it is surely true to say that we cannot imagine any better way in which God could be revealed to man than as man. Thus, in a world inhabited by human beings, the Incarnation is antecedently probable.

(b) It is evident that He convinced His contemporaries. No doubt, like all Jews, they were expecting the Messiah, but it is very questionable whether they expected that the Messiah would be God Incarnate. Moreover, many things happened to try their faith in the deity of Jesus Christ, such as the shock of His Passion and Crucifixion. Yet it is beyond doubt that St. Peter, St. John, St. Paul and the rest would have accepted the Nicene Creed. Perhaps they would have felt that the only alternative to believing Him to be divine was to believe Him to be not good. *Aut deus aut homo non bonus.* For such sayings as "I am the light of the world,"¹⁸ "I and the Father are one,"¹⁹ "No man cometh unto the Father but by me,"²⁰ did not fall from the lips of a "good man," but from One Who claimed what no man dare claim—an unique Sonship.

(c) Then there is the witness of the Church. Undoubtedly the Christian Church is built upon the doctrine of the Incarnation. When St. Peter

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

had got to the point of declaring “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” our Lord said: “On this rock I will build My church.”²¹ It is at least probable that the rock was the confession which St. Peter made. It is important to emphasise this point. Some people have suggested that the real strength of Christianity is to be found in Christ’s moral teaching, e.g. as given in the Sermon on the Mount; and that the dogma of His deity constitutes a hindrance rather than a help to Christian progress. But if that were true, the Jewish religion would surely be the progressive religion, for the Jews have the Sermon on the Mount, and other teaching given by the greatest of the Jews, and are not encumbered by the necessity of accepting the deity of Christ; and yet it is not the Jewish but the Christian religion which progresses and prevails. The Christian Church rests on the belief in the Godhead of Jesus Christ, and the Christian Church has gone forth conquering and to conquer. May I quote the testimony of an unbiased witness. Mr. Lecky writes:

“It was reserved for Christianity to present to the world an ideal character who through all the changes of eighteen centuries has inspired the hearts of men with an impassioned love, has shown itself capable of acting on all

THIS IS OUR FAITH

ages, nations, temperaments, and conditions and has been not only the highest pattern of virtue but the strongest incentive to its practice. . . .”²²

Such quotations could easily be multiplied; nor would it be difficult to show that where He is not thwarted by man’s rebellion, Christ still wins His victories amongst all races in all parts of the world. Undoubtedly there are many more Christians in the world to-day than ever before. Bearing this fact in mind, have we not a powerful argument for the truth of the doctrine that we are considering? For if it is *not* true, Christianity rests upon a delusion, and it is surely incredible that a false religion should have won, and should continue to win, these amazing victories. “Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?”²³ “A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit.”²⁴

(d) There is one rather unusual piece of evidence, which I will give in the words of the late Professor Romanes: “One of the strongest pieces of objective evidence in favour of Christianity is not sufficiently enforced by apologists. It is the absence from the biography of Christ of any doctrines which the subsequent growth of human knowledge, whether in natural science, ethics, political economy, or elsewhere, has had to discount. This negative argument is really almost

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

as strong as is the positive one, from what Christ did teach; for when we consider what a large number of sayings are recorded of, or at least, attributed to, Him, it becomes most remarkable that in literal truth there is no reason why any of His words should ever pass away, in the sense of becoming obsolete.”²⁵

(e) Finally, akin to the evidence offered by the progress of the Christian Church, is the evidence of personal experience.

St. Polycarp, shortly before his martyrdom, said: “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never forsook me—how can I now blaspheme my King?” This evidence of personal experience is the best evidence for you or me.

And the multiplicity of this experience is something which must be reckoned with by the sceptic.

This leads me to say a word on the fortifying of our own personal faith in the Incarnation. It has already been pointed out that faith in any Christian doctrine is relative rather than absolute, in the sense that we do not either believe or not, but believe more or less. At times faith may seem to be secure and strong, and again, at times, we have our doubts. We always need to be strengthening and deepening our convictions. It will be done, to some extent, by study and thought; if we will give full weight to such considerations as I have been urging, we may come to see that it is

THIS IS OUR FAITH

more reasonable to believe than not to believe, and so far we shall be helped to a stronger faith; this means securing a time for study and thought; a time when we may sit down and ponder the subject, giving due weight to all the many reasons on account of which men have come to the conviction which finds expression in the Nicene Creed.

But an even surer way is the way of experience. St. John represents our Lord as saying: "He that loveth Me shall be loved of my Father and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him."²⁶ Manifestations are always given to lovers. This is true in the realm of art, it is true also amongst all sentient creatures. Animals are quick to know those who care for them; and they manifest themselves to their lovers. So do children; instinctively they run to those who love children, and decline the forced attentions of those whose approach to them is hardly sincere. Thus, those who have learnt, partly through familiarity with the Gospels, the attractiveness of the Son of Man, and through their own devotions have come into a real relationship with Him, and are learning "the love of the Lord," these find that they are moving along the path which ends in strong conviction. "He that loveth Me . . . I will manifest Myself to him."

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

The doctrine of which I have written in this chapter is of vital importance, both to religion in the narrower sense and to morals. "Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us," was the cry of the Apostles, and it is ours. In the mysterious world we must have knowledge of Him from Whom all things originate, and yet He seems too great—"incomprehensible"; but, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." In Christ God is focussed in such sort that we may realise all we need to know. There "God stooping shows sufficient of His light for us in the dark to rise by." Well may Mr. Gladstone have said: "The Incarnation is the one hope of our poor, wayward humanity." "No man cometh to the Father but by Me."

Moreover, what is possibly even more important to us than the question "Is there God?" is the question "Is God good?" And although, as I think, there is evidence in nature of the beneficence of the Creator, there is also (as we have seen) much in nature, and in human experience, which *seems* to contradict faith in a God Who is all-holy and all-loving—the God by Whom "the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

Here, most urgently, we need reassurance. And we have it in Christ. No one surely can think of Him otherwise than as affording the

THIS IS OUR FAITH

supreme example of love in action. The claim implied in His words "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" goes unchallenged, and if indeed God was in Christ, then we have complete assurance that "God so loved—so loves—the world" and all His children.

And the doctrine is vital in the sphere of morals. For Christ's way is the only way for men and nations, and yet He makes tremendous demands—demands which will not be conceded unless we feel that His authority is supreme. But if we believe, with more or less faith, that He speaks with the authority of God, then, surely, it is our wisdom, as it is our duty, to respond.

So, to conclude. Christ tells us all that we need to know, as yet, about our Father in heaven, and shows us the way of life. He is the image of the invisible God, and when a man bows before that image he

*Stands on the heights of his life
With a glimpse of the height that is higher.²⁷*

CHAPTER VI

WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY GHOST, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY

*Christ took our nature on him, not that he
'Bore all things loved it, for the purity:
No, but he dressed him with our human trim,
Because our flesh stood most in need of him.*

ROBERT HERRICK

IN considering the several clauses of the Apostles' Creed, it becomes necessary to say something about the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. It has often been said that it is possible to believe in the Incarnation without believing the clause in the Creed in which the Church declares that our Lord was born of a virgin. This may possibly be the case; but my own conviction is that belief in the Incarnation (in the true sense) would not long survive disbelief in the Virgin Birth. It has been recorded that there is no early Christian writer who denied the Virgin Birth and believed in the Incarnation.

It is not easy to see why any greater difficulty should be felt about this miracle than about other miracles; nor why unless they dismiss miracles altogether (which is equivalent to the rejection of historical Christianity) people should find it

THIS IS OUR FAITH

impossible to accept the Virgin Birth. For, using the terms as they are generally understood, a "natural" birth is due to God acting "naturally" and a "supernatural" birth is due to God acting, from our point of view, "supernaturally." But that which is humanly supernatural may be divinely natural.

But perhaps the difficulty arises from a feeling that this particular miracle is supported by insufficient evidence. We may recall the late Prof. T. H. Huxley's oft-quoted words : "I have not the slightest objection to offer a priori to all the propositions in the three creeds. The mysteries of the Church are child's play compared to the mysteries of nature. Virgin procreation, and resuscitation from apparent death, are ordinary phenomena for the naturalist. It would be a great error, therefore, to suppose that the agnostic rejects theology because of its puzzles and wonders. He rejects it simply because, in his judgment, there is no evidence sufficient to warrant the theological propositions."¹

What evidence is there of the fact of the Virgin Birth?

We naturally seek this evidence primarily in the New Testament; and it should be noted that the New Testament, as a collection of historical records, comes to us with very high authority. It may be supposed that all but a very few people

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

accept and believe the main facts of Christ's earthly life, on the authority of the New Testament. The school of those who deny the actual existence of Jesus Christ may, as I have already urged, be ignored. But it is not legitimate for anyone to take the Gospels, and accept therein all that he likes, rejecting what he does not like. If the New Testament is good enough authority for the main facts of Christ's earthly life, it is good enough authority also for the mode of His Birth.

Now it should be noted that the only Gospels which record the Birth of our Lord, record His Virgin Birth—the first Gospel clearly giving the account from Joseph's point of view, and the third Gospel from that of the Virgin Mary. It is true that neither St. Mark nor St. John record the fact, and naturally the question is asked why they make no reference to the subject. The omission can easily be explained. St. Mark's Gospel, which is the earliest of the four, was written to meet the desire for some record of Christ's *ministry*, and St. Mark is not concerned to relate anything earlier than the mission of St. John the Baptist. St. John's Gospel, again, was written long after the others, evidently in order to supplement them; indeed St. John expressly denies the completeness of his Gospel, and declares that its purpose is mainly spiritual. So he does not narrate anything about our Lord's childhood and

THIS IS OUR FAITH

youth. That, he knew, had already been done. Nor does he even record such a signal event as the institution of the Holy Communion. The only evangelists, therefore, who were concerned to relate the Birth of Christ record the Virgin Birth. But it is noticeable (as Bishop Gore once pointed out) that in St. Mark's Gospel, the words which in St. Luke's are: "Is not this the carpenter's son?" run "Is not this the carpenter?" As if St. Mark, who, unlike St. Luke, had made no mention of the Virgin Birth, must leave no room for misconception.

Similarly, in St. John's account of the "wedding feast" at Cana of Galilee, the Virgin Mary is quite clearly represented as expecting from her Son action of a super-normal character.

St. Paul's evidence is indirect, but none the less it is of value. St. Paul did not write a gospel, still less a biography of Christ; but some of St. Paul's arguments in his epistles seem to require the fact of the Virgin Birth as their basis. Take, for instance, his doctrine of the second Adam.² Jesus Christ, according to St. Paul, is a new departure; He is a new moral creation; in Him is a new manhood; and this theory would seem to be quite incompatible with His being, by physical generation, merely one of the sons of the old Adam. Indeed, we shall all feel that if the Incarnation is what we believe it to be, it is but

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

natural and fitting that it should be associated with a Birth which was unique. It will not make the record of so abnormal an event as the Incarnation of God more reliable if we try to strip that record of every circumstance which is unusual or even unique. So the Church has felt.

Dr. Simpson, in his book *Creative Revelation*, quotes Dr. Harnack as declaring that the ideas expressed in the words "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," are "primitive in themselves and are declared to be primitive by the fact that at the end of the first century, or at least at the beginning of the second century, they were the common property of Christians . . . but every belief (he adds) which at that time was the common property of Christians must be traced back to the Churches of Palestine, and must be ascribed to the first decades after the Resurrection." Dr. Harnack is also emphatic in declaring that the Virgin Birth of our Lord, as believed in by the Church from the earliest days, owes nothing to heathen sources.

Thus it was, at first; thus it has been; and the witness of the long line of Christian believers in the truth of this miracle is in itself an evidence. Throughout her history the Church has not hesitated to enshrine in her great creeds the doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Christ.

CHAPTER VII

SUFFERED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE, WAS CRUCIFIED, DEAD AND BURIED

*So, the All-great, were the All-loving too—
So, through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, “O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself.
Thou hast no power nor may’st conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee.”*

ROBERT BROWNING

THE actual words which stand at the head of this chapter do not seem to demand any explanation. At this point the Creed records historical events that are well attested in the Gospels. And no one need have any occasion to doubt that, in fact, Jesus Christ was crucified in accordance with the sentence reluctantly passed by Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judaea.

It hardly seems to fall within the scope of this little book to introduce what might properly be called a devotional commentary on the Crucifixion and its attendant circumstances. It is, however, the case that reference to the death of our Lord raises in our minds the thought of the Atonement,

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

of which, accordingly, it seems fitting that something should be said—albeit very briefly—at this point.

The doctrine of the Atonement has been felt to be one of the most difficult of all doctrines. This is partly because it can hardly be said that the doctrine is anywhere really explained in Holy Scripture. If we read the fifteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, we have a clear explanation, by means of illustration, of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body; but no one can point to a similar passage of Scripture in which there is as clear an explanation of the doctrine of the Atonement.

Another reason why the doctrine presents such difficulty is that is it complex in character. When we are asked what is meant by “the Communion of Saints,” we can answer “the Fellowship of all Christian people, living and departed, who are all united to each other because each has been by baptism made a member of Christ.” But if we ask the question: “What is meant by the Atonement?”, we cannot give in a sentence, or even in a few sentences, a statement of the meaning of that doctrine which could be considered to be adequate. Further to illustrate the point—suppose we look at a picture, we should not gain anything by going round to the other side and looking at the picture from the back. Supposing,

THIS IS OUR FAITH

however, that we look at a mountain—such as Snowdon—we may look at it from the road which runs from Caernarvon to Beddgelert; but there are many other points of view, and no one can claim to have seen Snowdon who has not seen it from Capel Curig, and from elsewhere. Now the doctrine of the Atonement is a doctrine which, like the mountain, has to be viewed successively from various angles. It is complex, and, therefore, it is difficult.

Let us, however, see what we can learn about it.

It may be useful, in the first place, to take the word “atonement” and so to divide its syllables that we pronounce it at-one-ment. Then the Atonement may signify to us all that our Lord did, and does, to make men “at one” with God—to reconcile men to Him. That is to say, the Atonement signifies our Lord’s Incarnation, Birth, Life, Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension, and His gift of the Holy Spirit to bring life to the Church and reality to all the means of grace. All these, and not only His death upon the Cross, are included in the Atonement.

It may be right very briefly to name some of the theories of the Atonement which have been proclaimed in the course of the history of the Church, but are generally felt to be obsolete. For example:

- (1) There is the theory that Christ redeemed men

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

by paying a ransom to the devil. The theory is that the devil possessed some sort of right over men's souls, owing to human sin, and that in some way Christ, by His death, paid the price to the devil for the redemption of his captives. The theory seems fanciful, if not absurd, to us. (2) Then there is the theory that the object of Christ's death upon the Cross is to vindicate the moral law. Sin must be punished, and Christ, divine and sinless, bore the punishment of sin in place of men, becoming their substitute. (3) Then there is the doctrine that Christ reconciles man to God by revealing the love of God in His life, and still more in His death, so bringing men to trust and love Him in return. This is suggested by such words as "God commendeth His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."¹ Or "We love (Him) because He first loved us."² This has been sometimes called the moral theory of the Atonement. It has the merit of simplicity, but hardly seems to be adequate. There are various other attempted explanations of the doctrine which need not be reviewed.

Having alluded to certain theories of the Atonement which may seem to us to be fanciful or inadequate, let me come now to offer some thoughts which may be of service to those who are perplexed when they try to understand the meaning

THIS IS OUR FAITH

of this difficult doctrine. In the interests of clarity I will write rather dogmatically—even abruptly. Here are the facts which must be taken into account.

(1) God is revealed to us—by our Lord—as a good Father, Who, moved by love, created mankind to respond to His own great love.

(2) Man—I am using the term to signify mankind in general—by wilfully failing to respond to God's call—i.e. by sin—broke that unity which God had intended and desired, and so frustrated God's loving purpose.

(3) Man realised this; he felt the disunion consequent upon sin. The point is brought out in the old story of the fall (so full of spiritual significance) in which Adam and Eve are represented after the fall as trying to hide from God.

(4) But mankind cannot be satisfied with this separation. In St. Augustine's words: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee." And so appears—not amongst the Jewish people only—the custom of sacrifice, of which the main object was by some means to restore fellowship with God.

As has been said: "The end of sacrifice is communion and union with God."

(5) Sacrifices, however, could never restore the union forfeited by sin. Let me suppose that someone had slandered you, blackened your

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

character; and then wished to recover the friendship with you which had been forfeited by the slander. He could not, surely, succeed in his aim by offering you a cheque and not withdrawing the slander. Similarly, God is represented as indicating the futility of sacrifice for its assigned purpose. "Thinkest thou that I will eat bulls' flesh and drink the blood of goats?"³ Not by such means can reunion with God be achieved.

(6) Clearly, the only thing which could unite—could atone—could make at-one—would be a life, the life which God wished men to live, a life of entire obedience to His will, a life in which no sin should mar the perfection of relationship to Him.

(7) Such a life, however, man never succeeded in living.

"God looked down upon the children of men to see if there were any that would understand and seek after God; but they are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become abominable, there is none that doeth good, no, not one."⁴

In consequence of this there was no "at-onement." So we reach an impasse. God desires man to be in fellowship with Himself; man shows that he is conscious of the loss of this fellowship, and desires its restoration, but he does

THIS IS OUR FAITH

not succeed in fulfilling the condition upon which alone fellowship is possible.

Then God Himself, God the Son, "for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man." And, as man, He lived the perfect human life—"Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God"⁵—"My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me."⁶ He lives this life in perfect obedience, even unto death.

And this life, this perfect life, was an offering acceptable to God; and, therefore, at that one point, *at Christ, perfect man*, God and man were—are—at one again; an "Atonement" has been made.

But, it may be said, "What has this to do with us? We can see that Christ lived the perfect life, we can see that the Man, Christ Jesus, is at one with God, but how are we affected thereby?" Here we need to grasp the fact that Christ has identified Himself with mankind. In the Te Deum we commonly sing "When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man." Probably the better translation would be "When thou tookest man upon thee to deliver him." Christ is not to be thought of merely as "a man," but as the second Adam, having identified Himself with humanity. And His Atonement avails for us as individuals, when we become identified with Him, when we

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

are made members of Christ (at first in baptism) and are kept in union with Him by the Communion of His Body and Blood; wherein (as the Prayer Book says) "We are one with Christ and Christ with us,"—and when we strive to be one with Him in heart and will, in warfare against evil, and in heavenly aspiration.

It is not, therefore, that He has done something instead of us, relieving us of all responsibility, and leaving us nothing to do; as when a benevolent person pays a fine on behalf of a convicted prisoner, and thus secures his release. The redemption which Christ has wrought *for* us must be wrought *in* us; so that we can (so to speak) claim our share in Him:

*Look, Father, look, on His anointed face,
And only look on us as found in Him.*

And so Christ not only lived and died, but rose again and ascended into heaven, and through the Spirit imparts His life to us in Sacraments and in all other means of grace, so that we, like Him, are made at-one with God. Thus He atones.

Such seems to be a very brief statement of the essential meaning of the Atonement. I do not claim that I have stated the doctrine in all its fullness. No man can do more—with any prospect of good results—than commend to others

THIS IS OUR FAITH

thoughts which, so far as they go, seem to him to be relevant and true.

At this point a question may very reasonably be asked. "If what has hitherto been stated is true, and if it is our Lord's perfect life which brings about the Atonement, why is so much evident stress laid upon His death, not only in 'popular theology' but by the writers of the New Testament?" It will be enough to quote, by way of example, such words as the following:

We "were redeemed with precious blood—even the blood of Christ."⁷

"The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin."⁸

"Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood."⁹

I will suggest certain reasons why in the New Testament so much stress has been laid (as indeed is the case) upon the death of Christ.

(1) Death is the crown of life. *Finis coronat opus.* The blood-shedding was the final act of obedience. Complete obedience must signify obedience even unto death, for it reaches its limit then, but not at any earlier stage; and as the death was the culminating act of obedience, it is only natural that it should be emphasised.

(2) All the writers of the New Testament were

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

men who, by long national tradition, and by personal experience, were accustomed to the slaughter of animals in sacrifice. Therefore, it is almost inevitable that in their representation of Christ's fulfilment of the sacrifices of the Jewish Church, they should especially emphasise the death of the victim. It is, however, pertinent to point out that even in the old Jewish sacrifices, when the animal had been killed, the blood, which represented the life, was taken by the priest and offered in the Temple. It is almost as if the offering had to be an offering of *life*; but that, in the case of the animal, the liberation of the blood (which represented the life) was only possible through its death. I believe I am right in saying that in all early religions (not in the Hebrew religion only) the blood is regarded as the life. It may be enough to quote Leviticus xvii.11: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life."

(3) It is also true that the appeal of the Cross, the appeal of Christ's sacrifice, comes home with great force to the hearts of men. Perhaps an event as tremendous as the death of the Son of God was needed in order to make us realise both the greatness of the Divine love, and the gravity of human sin.

THIS IS OUR FAITH

It would appear to be true, however, that the essence of the perfect sacrifice was the perfect life—obedient unto death. St. Bernard says: “It was not the death but the will of one who died voluntarily which pleased God.” And St. Anselm teaches that God willed, primarily, the obedience of Christ, and only in a secondary sense the death of Christ, because, in the sinful condition of the world, this obedience led to death.

The death of Christ, surely, was man’s act. He came to live amongst men the perfect life—“whom they slew and hanged upon a tree.”¹⁰

Already I have indicated that I am not claiming to have given a complete statement or explanation of the doctrine of the Atonement; but what I have said may possibly have served to clear away some false notions; as, for example, the notion that God the Father was so angry that He could not be appeased until Christ endured terrible sufferings; or the notion that Christ was a kind of substitute for us, Who has done everything that needs to be done, so that we have no further obligation. Such ideas must be resolutely banished from our minds. Nor does it seem to be of any practical value to ask the question: “Could not the Atonement have been effected in some other way?” At least it is difficult to see how

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

God and man could become one more surely than by God becoming man; and the suffering and death were the result of man's misdeeds. "Him ye, by the hand of lawless men, did crucify and slay."¹¹

It might perhaps be useful briefly to summarise the leading ideas which I have tried to set forward on this difficult subject.

Man was made for fellowship with God.

Sin broke the fellowship.

Sacrifices could not restore it; only a life of loyalty could do this.

And this life man failed to live.

Christ became man, and lived such a life, faithful unto death.

Man shares that life, and shares the Atonement as he is made one with Christ, Who not only lived and died, but rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven, and, through the Spirit, imparts His perfect Manhood to His people, so that they are "accepted in the beloved."

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It is well for us to try and understand the doctrines of our faith, and, therefore, to read and study and think and discuss until we have a clear grasp of the meaning of our Creed; but what matters most is to accept in faith the great truth that Christ "loved me and gave Himself for me";

THIS IS OUR FAITH

and then to respond with love and service. For, in the words of the children's hymn:

*He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good.*

*A Man of Sorrows amongst us came,
An outcast man and lonely,
But He looked on me, and through endless years,
Him must I serve, Him only.*

CHAPTER VIII

HE DESCENDED INTO HELL

. . . *Glimmering all the dead
Looked upon Jesus; as they stood, some thought
Spread from the furthest edges like a breeze,
Till like a leafy forest, the huge host
Whispered together, bending all one way
Toward Him; and then ensued a stillness deep.
But suddenly the form of Jesus stirred;
And all the dead stirred with Him suddenly.
He shuddered in a rapture; and from His eyes
They felt returning agonies of hope.*

STEPHEN PHILLIPS

THIS clause, which has been the subject of much controversy, was a comparatively late addition to the Creed. It is found only in Western Creeds, and finds no place in the Nicene or other Eastern creeds.

It has been interpreted in several different ways. Some have thought that it merely means that our Lord had complete human experience—that when His Body lay in the grave, His Spirit passed into the “other world.” Others have interpreted it as meaning that He suffered the pains of Hell, in the sense in which that word is commonly employed.

The formularies of the Church of England are not very explicit; for example, the third of the

THIS IS OUR FAITH

Articles of Religion—"Of the going down of Christ into Hell"—runs thus: "As Christ died for us and was buried, so also is it to be believed that He went down into Hell." Here is merely a statement of the fact, although in an earlier and longer form of this Article there was an explicit reference to a critical passage in the first Epistle of St. Peter.

As many people have been perplexed by this article of the Creed, it must have some consideration.

In an attempt to reach the truth, we must enquire first into the meaning of the word "Hell." In popular parlance this signifies the place of punishment for the wicked after death, but this does not seem to be the meaning of the word as used in this clause of the Creed. In the different Latin versions of the Creed, the words which are used for Hell are inferi, or sometimes inferna (or, in the singular infernum). It may not be necessary to estimate the slight differences in meaning between these various forms, for in the Vulgate—the Latin version of the Scriptures—they appear to be used indiscriminately to translate the Hebrew Sheol and the Greek Hades. Moreover in the Septuagint—the Greek version of the Old Testament—Sheol is almost always rendered by the Greek word Hades. Accordingly we shall be helped to a right interpretation of the word

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

Hell as it appears in the Apostles' Creed if we can arrive at the meaning of Sheol and Hades. Sheol is said to be derived from a word of which the root signifies "to be hollow"; and the Greek word Hades means the unseen world. Our English word Hell derives from an Anglo-Saxon word "Helan," signifying "to cover," and therefore really means—the unseen or covered place. It is unfortunate that this word—Hell—is also used as a translation of Gehenna, and has come to signify the place of punishment. The word "Gehenna" is derived from the Hebrew expression which signifies the Valley of Hinnom, and this valley of Hinnom lay to the south and southwest of Jerusalem. According to several authorities, perpetual fires were kept burning in the valley, in which were consumed the dead bodies of criminals, the carcases of animals, and the refuse of the city. The term "Gehenna" is used in a variety of ways in the course of Jewish history, but according to the late Dr. R. H. Charles, it is always used in the New Testament to signify the final place of punishment into which the wicked were to be cast after the Last Judgment.

Dr. E. C. S. Gibson, in his commentary on the Thirty-Nine Articles, quotes Bishop Horsley as saying that the word Hell "is properly used both

THIS IS OUR FAITH

in the Old and New Testament to render the Hebrew word in the one and the Greek word in the other, which describes the invisible mansions of the disembodied souls, without any reference to sufferings."

Taking the word Hell in the Creed as equivalent to Sheol or Hades, it will signify the place, or places, of departed souls. According to Jewish belief, this was divided into two parts, in one of which are the souls of the faithful in peace and rest; and, in the other, the souls of sinners already suffering the penalty of evil doing. This belief can claim the authority of the New Testament so far as that is contained in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, where Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom—the term, apparently, signifying Paradise, while the Rich Man is spoken of as in torment.

But it may be said that the word Hell in this article of the Creed is a neutral term "conveying no notion of the condition of the spirits detained in it."

What authority have we, then, for believing in the descent into Hell? Reference may be made to some passages in the New Testament.

(1) In Ephesians iv. 9, we read: "Now that He ascended what is it but that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth." This verse has sometimes been interpreted as referring to the

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

“descent into Hell,” but it could also be interpreted as referring to the Incarnation—the contrast being between “Heaven above” and “earth beneath.” The passage is in no way conclusive.

(2) In Acts ii. 24 and following verses, we have a report of St. Peter’s sermon, in which he quotes the Sixteenth Psalm, and applies the words to our Lord thus—David “being therefore a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne, he foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of Christ, that neither was He left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.” St. Peter’s application of this passage affords testimony to the fact of the descent into Hades.

(3) In St. Luke xxiii. 43, we read of our Lord’s promise to the penitent thief: “Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.” These most significant words suggest that we have our Lord’s authority for saying that after His death He would pass into the abode of departed spirits or, as the Creed has it, would “descend into Hell.”

(4) But the most crucial passage is that contained in St. Peter’s first Epistle, chapter iii, verses 18 to 20.

“Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he

THIS IS OUR FAITH

might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit; in which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which aforetime were disobedient, when the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is eight souls, were saved through water.”

Here St. Peter definitely signifies the reason and purpose for the descent into Hell; indeed, apart from this passage, it might be possible to interpret the clause in the Creed as signifying only that our Lord fulfilled the conditions of human death, as He had fulfilled the conditions of human life. But St. Peter says of our Lord that He “went and preached unto the spirits in prison.” Different interpretations have been given of this phrase, but they seem to imply that our Lord in spirit proclaimed Himself and His Gospel to those who had lived under the old covenant. This interpretation of the words seems to be accepted in the Prayer book, for the words form part of the Epistle for Easter Eve, and this passage could hardly have been chosen for that occasion unless it had been meant to associate the words with the descent into Hell.

A further question arises, namely whether our Lord’s proclamation of Himself was to the

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

particular generation specified by St. Peter, or to all who had lived and died under the old covenant —St. Peter referring to one particular generation as typical of all. The question is one which can be more easily asked than answered, as also another question, namely whether the preaching was effectual. There is at least an indication that it was so in the words: “For unto this end was the gospel preached even to the dead that they might be judged according to men in the flesh but live according to God in the Spirit.”¹ But we are moving in a region of speculation, and one in which it seems hardly profitable to move.

In general, it may be enough to say that the clause in the Creed expresses our belief that our Lord, in spirit, passed into the other world; and that there are at least grounds for believing that, in some way which is beyond our present understanding, He Himself, as the Incarnate Lord, and His Gospel, were made known to those to whom He went.

CHAPTER IX

THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD

*The face of Death is toward the Sun of Life:
His shadow darkens earth: his truer name
Is "Onward."*

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

IN dealing with this article of the Creed, I will arrange what I have to say under three headings as follows:

- (1) The Fact of the Resurrection.
- (2) The Evidence for the Fact.
- (3) The Interpretation, Significance and Consequences of the Fact.

(1) The fact is stated in words which stand at the head of this chapter. The Christian belief is that the body of Jesus Christ, which had died upon the Cross, was taken down and buried in a rock-tomb in a garden by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus; that the body lay there from what we now call Good Friday evening, through the Sabbath (that is Saturday) and that very early on the first day of the week—or, as we should say, on Easter Sunday—His body was restored to life, i.e. to life of a new order and quality; and,

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

apparently passed through the grave clothes (which were left in the Tomb) and through the walls of the grave; and was afterwards manifested to the Lord's disciples, having risen to new and endless life. "Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him."¹

His body, I have said, "passed through" the grave clothes in which it had been wrapped. No doubt this is a "manner of speaking," and our words are inadequate to the occasion. But in some such way we must express what is indicated by a curious note which St. John appends to his account of the Resurrection, wherein he says that the napkin which was about His head was not with the linen clothes, but was wrapped together in a place by itself—suggesting that both the head cloth and the linen clothes remained in their respective positions when our Lord's body had passed out of the sepulchre. I have also said that His body appears to have "passed through" the walls of the Tomb; perhaps I should rather have said that it was at first within the Tomb, and then without. For it is reasonable to hold that the rolling away of the stone was not designed to enable our Lord to come out of the Tomb, but to enable the disciples to go in (as St. Peter actually did) and to verify for themselves the fact of the Resurrection.

THIS IS OUR FAITH

(2) *The evidence for the fact.* This is very strong; and it should be borne in mind that it has withstood long-continued attack, on an international scale, by extremely able and learned men, but remains unshaken.

(a) There is, first of all, the documentary evidence, of which the earliest items are, no doubt, to be found in the epistles of St. Paul, which were written before the Gospels were written, although in our Bibles they are placed after the Gospels. St. Paul expressly declares: "I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried and that He hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."²

Similar evidence to that of St. Paul is given in other parts of the New Testament; indeed, one might almost say that the Resurrection is assumed or implied on every page of the New Testament. But when we come to consider the accounts of the Resurrection which are given by the four evangelists, a crop of problems arises, into the details of which it would clearly be impossible to enter in the course of one short chapter.

It is certainly difficult to construct one continuous narrative of the Resurrection from the accounts which are given in the four Gospels; but this is not surprising. We must remember

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

that on Easter Day, after the women who were the first to reach the sepulchre had learnt that it was no longer tenanted by the body which they came to anoint, there must have been great wonderment and perplexity amongst our Lord's followers. There must have been much coming and going, and perhaps repeated visits by the same people to the Tomb, and repeated messages from one to another; it is unlikely that any one of the Evangelists could have recorded everything that happened; and therefore each tells what he knew (or had learnt), giving only part of the whole story; thus their accounts inevitably differ. This, however, does not in the least degree invalidate their evidence. If, independently, all four evangelists had told precisely the same story, we should certainly have suspected collusion, and the concoction of a tale. Within our own experience, if half a dozen people independently write an account of one event (even if it be only a cricket or football match), owing to their different points of view they are sure to give different impressions; but it would be supremely foolish to suggest that, because of such discrepancies, the event described probably did not occur!

In the New Testament, then, we have cumulative evidence, from several different sources, of the fact of the Resurrection. Nor is it possible

THIS IS OUR FAITH

for any reasonable being to ignore the evidence of the New Testament. By all except some eccentrics, the New Testament is considered to contain historic documents upon which reliance can be placed for an accurate knowledge of the main facts of our Lord's life and of His teaching; and, as I suggested earlier in this book, it is not really scientific to say: "I will accept the evidence of the New Testament for the fact that Jesus Christ lived in Palestine nearly 2,000 years ago, and I will believe that He spoke many of the words which are attributed to Him in the Bible, but I will not accept the authority of the same books and the same writers for any occurrence such as the Resurrection, which lies outside normal human experience." Men cannot really treat documents as affording reliable evidence for what they are ready and anxious to believe, and as being otherwise valueless.

(b) Let us now suppose—by way of strengthening our convictions—that Christ did not rise from the dead. At once we are faced by what seem to be greater and less easily surmountable problems than those with which believers are confronted.

(i) There is the fact of the empty Tomb. It is very difficult to believe that "on the third day" the Tomb in which our Lord had been buried was not empty. It was guarded, we must

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

remember, by Roman soldiers. Pilate, somewhat caustically (in view of subsequent events) told the Jews to make it “as sure as ye can”; for our Lord’s enemies had expressly suggested that the body might be stolen; hence the sealing of the Tomb and the setting of a watch. If, on the Third day, the Tomb had not been empty, it would have been the easiest thing for the Jews to crush the rumours of the Resurrection by obtaining Pilate’s leave to break the seal and produce the body. What they did, in fact, is thus recorded in St. Matthew’s Gospel: “They gave large money to the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor’s ears, we will persuade him, and rid you of care. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying was spread among the Jews, and continueth unto this day.”³

From which it would appear that the Empty Tomb was a fact which could not be denied. The question then arises, what had happened to our Lord’s body if, in fact, He had not risen from the dead? It is hardly possible to suggest more than two answers. The body, clearly, must have been removed, and concealed. It could conceivably have been removed by Christ’s enemies, or by His friends. If it had been removed by His enemies surely they would have produced the

THIS IS OUR FAITH

body when the disciples began to proclaim Christ risen from the dead. It would have been quite simple thus to silence this teaching. But it was not so silenced because the body could not be produced.

If the body had been taken away by His friends, and was, in fact, hidden, then we are faced with the insuperable difficulty that the apostles were ready not only to proclaim what they knew to be false, but, eventually, to die for what they knew to be false. To such extremities are they driven who would deny the fact of the Resurrection.

(ii) My last few sentences suggest a further difficulty. It has, I think, been generally admitted even by those who reject the Christian Creed, that the Apostles themselves were convinced that our Lord had risen from the dead; in other words it is not seriously suggested that they went out into the world proclaiming a resurrection which they were aware had not taken place. The only theory, therefore, on which their action can be accounted for is that they were themselves deceived into believing that Christ had risen; and as they are represented as having seen Him and spoken to Him after His Resurrection, the suggestion is put forward that these were either what are commonly called subjective visions, i.e. creations of their own minds, or (if

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

that suggestion be ruled out) that the visions were objective in the sense that they were bestowed upon the apostles (and not due to their own disordered brains) to overcome the depression or despair into which they might have fallen in consequence of the Crucifixion. In regard to the latter suggestion, this can hardly be accepted by religious people, for it would imply what almost amounts to deception on the part of God.

The other view has been frequently put forward to account for the apostles' conviction that Christ had risen. It is said that they were in a state of excited expectation, in a condition in which men may actually see what they hope to see, and that, eagerly expecting that the Lord would rise from the dead, they saw Him in visions. The idea must not be dismissed as altogether outrageous, because it is a fact that we see with our brains rather than with our eyes. The eye conveys an impression to the brain, an impression which is there registered; but if the impression can be conveyed in any other way, a vision is possible. It is said, for example, that in a condition of "delirium tremens" the patient may see creatures which, in fact, are not there, but are seen in the disordered brain, which produces the vision. The same phenomenon is apparent in dreams. A dream may be very vivid, but what

THIS IS OUR FAITH

you see in the dream is not objectively there to be seen. The theory, however, is beset with difficulties, for the apostles and the early disciples were not, apparently, expecting the Resurrection in spite of the suggestions and hints contained in our Lord's words during His earlier ministry. The women who went to the Empty Tomb on Easter morning went to anoint a dead body, not to greet one risen from the grave; and, when our Lord was conversing with His two companions on the way to Emmaus, after they had expressed their disappointment at the dashing of their hopes, He said: "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have written."⁴ Even the news brought from the sepulchre by the women appeared as "idle tales" to some of those to whom it was conveyed. It would not appear that the condition of expectation requisite for such subjective visions was present.

Nor is it probable that the same subjective vision would be experienced at the same time by a number of people. Moreover, is it conceivable that if the apostles saw, or thought they saw, the Christ, they would not have spoken to Him? But no answer could have been vouchsafed. And on this theory the records of what the risen Christ is supposed to have said would go by the board. The "vision theory" must be rejected.

In fact, the witness of the New Testament—

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

the documentary evidence—is so strong as hardly to be shaken.

(c) Then we have in some way to account for the observance of Sunday. It would appear that, almost from the time of the Resurrection, Sunday (the first day in the week) was observed by the first Christians as well as the Sabbath (Saturday) which they observed as devout Jews. To place another day in the week on the same level as the traditional Sabbath, and later on to substitute the observance of the first day for the observance of the seventh, represents a most revolutionary change. What a tremendous event, or supposed event, there must have been in order to account for the inauguration of the observance of the first day of the week—which has continued until our own time! Nothing but the conviction that the Resurrection had happened has ever been suggested to account for this. The history of Sunday, in fact, is a very strong and valid argument for the Resurrection.

(d) We have to add to all this the witness of the Christian Church. At the Crucifixion the followers of Christ were a dismayed and scattered band. On Easter Day they had locked themselves into the upper room for fear of the Jews. But very shortly afterwards they were changed men, full of hope and enthusiasm, eager, in spite of opposition and persecution, to tell their message.

THIS IS OUR FAITH

The only way in which this change can be explained is by reference to the Resurrection; which had completely revived and fortified the hopes which the tragedy of the Crucifixion had dashed. And if we look down the long ages of the Christian Church, we see that this immense structure, so incalculably beneficial to mankind (which could never have come into being, or at least would never have been established, but for the Resurrection) affords striking evidence of the truth that “on the third day He rose again.”

(e) Moreover, this witness is repeated in the history of individual Christians; who, throughout the ages, have felt sure that the Master Whom they served was not a man who had died outside Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, but the living Lord—and have known in their experience the power of His Resurrection.

(3) We come finally to the interpretation and significance of the fact of the Resurrection.

(a) I have just alluded to the effect upon the disciples of Christ of the knowledge that “Jesus lives.” It means that, in the face of all difficulties and temptations, the resources of the believing Christian are adequate, for they are found in One who has been victorious both over sin and death. “I can do all things,” says St. Paul, “through Christ which strengtheneth me.”⁵ These words

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

St. Paul would never have used had he not known that Christ had risen from the dead.

In Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* the tale is told of Christian's great fight with Apollyon; and how, after the struggle had been in progress for some time, "Christian gave him a deadly thrust, and then made at him again, saying: 'Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loveth us.' And with that Apollyon spread forth his dragon's wings and sped him away." Such is the "power of His Resurrection."

(b) The other most significant consequence of the Resurrection is suggested when St. Paul says that Christ is risen from the dead—"the first fruits of them that sleep." When each year we observe Good Friday and Holy Week, my own desire is to think of our Lord as God on Good Friday and as Man on Easter Day. For, if on Good Friday we think of Him as God, God dying for us, we have complete assurance of the love of God for all mankind; and if on Easter Day we think of Him as Man, we shall have the sure hope of a future life. "Man" has conquered death, "man" has risen from the grave to endless life, the first fruits of them that sleep. As we shall see later on there are many converging lines of evidence in favour of belief in a future life, but the whole argument seems to be clinched by the

THIS IS OUR FAITH

great fact that the One Who was crucified, dead and buried, on the Third Day rose from the dead. "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."⁶

There is one other thought. It is impossible for us to visualise the life of the world to come except on the basis of belief in the resurrection of the body. This is not my present subject, and I am not going to enlarge upon it here; but when we wish to understand the nature of that resurrection body which we hope to wear in the future life, our best and only guide seems to be found in the indications which the Scriptures afford of the nature of the Lord's body after His Resurrection. We may be sure that that Body was not subject to weariness, sickness, decay or death; but we see it endowed with new powers, even beyond those which were Christ's during the thirty years of His life as man upon earth. He can enter a room where the doors are locked; not (so to speak) passing through the walls, but having been outside, then being, at will, within. Nor need we suppose, when He vanished from the sight of the two disciples at Emmaus, and afterwards manifested Himself in Jerusalem, that it was necessary for His risen body to make the journey from one place to another. Now He is at

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

Emmaus, now, at will, in Jerusalem. This is but an indication of the powers that may belong to us when "He shall have changed the body of our humiliation that it may be made like unto the body of His glory."⁷

CHAPTER X

HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN AND SITTETH ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY

*Bright portals of the sky,
Embossed with sparkling stars,
Doors of eternity,
With diamantine bars,
Your arras rich uphold,
Loose all your bolts and springs,
Ope wide your leaves of gold,
That in your roofs may come the King of kings.*

WILLIAM DRUMMOND

IN such a clause of the Creed as this, we have to use language which is manifestly inadequate. “Ascension” is a spatial term appropriate to our experience, but quite misleading if it should suggest to anyone that heaven is located in any particular direction in relation to this planet. Moreover, such an expression as “He sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty” must obviously be taken as figurative. We have to express our beliefs in human language, and we may use the best that is available, although fully conscious of its inadequacy, and, therefore, of its liability to mislead unimaginative people.

Let us, however, address ourselves to the great

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

truths which this article of the Creed is designed to express. The actual event, referred to as the Ascension, is described in the following passage in St. Luke's Gospel:

“And he led them out until they were over against Bethany: and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the temple, blessing God.”¹

In the Acts St. Luke writes: “And when he had said these things, as they were looking, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.”²

In the last verses of St. Mark's Gospel (about the genuineness of which there is some doubt) we read “So then the Lord, after he had spoken unto them, was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.”³

We have no reason to doubt that this event took place; and that, on a day which the Church has commemorated as Ascension Day, our Lord's visible presence was withdrawn from His disciples. Of the occurrence itself no more need be said; it is certainly recorded by St. Luke; and it

THIS IS OUR FAITH

is implied on almost every page of the New Testament. But on its significance it is necessary to enlarge.

Many thoughts are suggested, and it will be possible to do little more than indicate what they are.

(1) The Ascension signifies the triumph of the incarnate Lord.

See the conqueror mounts in triumph!

*See the King in royal state,
Riding on the clouds His chariot,
To His heavenly palace gate.*

*Hark! the choirs of angel voices,
Joyful alleluias sing,
And the portals high are lifted,
To receive their Heavenly King.*

We can sing such words as these without any intention of interpreting them as literally descriptive, but rather with the idea that they express truth in a figure.

“Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in.”⁴

It is legitimate, surely, to let one’s fancy clothe the event, to which such frequent reference is made in the New Testament, with the accompaniment of imaginative detail. At least we may

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

think of the Ascension as signalling the triumphant close of that stage of our Master's ministry which was enacted here upon earth.

(2) The Ascension gives us assurance of what might be called the perpetuation of the incarnation. Many years ago, I heard the headmaster of a Church day school giving a religious lesson to his scholars, in the course of which he asked the question: "When did our Lord become man?" To which the answer was given (it is sufficiently correct): "At Christmas." The next question was: "When did our Lord cease to be man," and the children were instructed to answer: "At His Ascension,"—which was, of course, the precise opposite of the truth.

It has been suggested that an appropriate illustration of the Incarnation is provided by a drawbridge which is let down from a castle across a moat, to the ground upon which the traveller stands, to make a way by which he can return home. So far, so good; but, if it were suggested that the raising of the drawbridge to its former position would signify the Ascension, the illustration would become completely misleading. For when we say, "He ascended into heaven," the "He" is the one who was born and crucified and died and rose again, the Incarnate One; Who still wears our human nature which, in Him, is for ever allied to the divine nature.

THIS IS OUR FAITH

I have quoted Mr. W. E. Gladstone's saying that the Incarnation is the one hope of our poor, wayward humanity. The Ascension assures us that it is a living hope. It is conceivable that our Lord, becoming incarnate, might have taken our nature into union with His divine nature during His earthly life of ministry as a means of manifesting Himself upon this earth to His contemporaries, and might then have laid aside that human nature as unworthy of everlasting union with the Deity. The mistake which the teacher made is not nonsensically absurd; but it is the very opposite of what we learn from the New Testament. God and man are united in one Who is for ever God and man.

(3) The Ascension should suggest to our minds our Lord's continued activity on our behalf. We are not to think of the glorified life to which He ascended as a life of effortless rest. It is true that the Creed (following various passages in the Bible) speaks of Him as "sitting down" at the right hand of God, but the expression indicates a position of honour and dignity and not of inactivity. Even in our common speech we sometimes use the term "sitting" as indicative of work. One of our rubrics suggests the use of a prayer during the "session" of the High Court of Parliament, i.e. when Parliament is "sitting"; and this is the time of Parliament's special activity. So the

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

heavenly "session" of our Lord signifies His continued and perpetual service on our behalf. And, in fact, in many passages of the New Testament, the point is brought out in another form, and our Lord is represented as "standing on the right hand of God,"⁵ or as one that "walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks."⁶ Again St. Paul says: "The Lord stood by me and strengthened me."⁷ In fact, we know from the whole revelation of the New Testament that we should think of our Lord as ever active on behalf of His people in the heavenly places. In the New Testament, and more particularly in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the nature of His activity is indicated in the application to Him of the term "High Priest." It is impossible here to attempt any detailed discussion of what this means. Those who desire to probe the great mystery, should read with care and concentration the whole of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and certain chapters of the Book of the Revelation.

Such passages as "He ever liveth to make intercession for us"⁸ suggest the work of the great High Priest, as, in the presence of the Heavenly Father, He remembers those for whom He wrought redemption.

Or again, we may recall our Lord's action whenever the Sacrament of Holy Communion is celebrated in His Church. Careful and

THIS IS OUR FAITH

intelligible teaching on this subject is conveyed in some of Dr. Bright's Communion hymns. Thus:

*And now, O Father, mindful of the love
That bought us, once for all, on Calvary's tree,
And having with us Him that pleads above,
We here present, we here spread forth to Thee
That only Offering perfect in Thine eyes,
The one true, pure, immortal Sacrifice.*

Or, to quote another hymn, by the same author:

*Once, only once, and once for all,
His precious life He gave;
Before the Cross our spirits fall,
And own it strong to save.*

*One offering, single and complete,
With lips and heart we say;
But what He never can repeat
He shows forth day by day.*

*For, as the priest of Aaron's line
Within the Holiest stood,
And sprinkled all the mercy-shrine
With sacrificial blood;*

*So He, Who once atonement wrought,
Our Priest, of endless power,
Presents Himself for those He bought
In that dark noontide hour.*

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

*His Manhood pleads where now it lives,
On Heaven's eternal throne;
And where, in mystic rite, He gives
Its presence to His own.*

(4) If Ascension Day may fittingly be spoken of as the Coronation Day of our Lord, it will suggest to our minds the thought of Him as King. And indeed this is a truth which sorely needs emphasis. No true Christian would actually say "We have no king but Cæsar;" but it is not uncommon even for some Christian people to think and act as if the State could override the judgment of the Lord; and this is indeed a form of apostasy. It is probably true that the average man (if such an one exists) does, in his heart, believe that what is sanctioned by law cannot really be wrong; and this in spite of the fact that it would not be impossible to transgress every one of the Ten Commandments without committing illegality. The most obvious example of a plain contradiction between the laws of Cæsar and of the Heavenly King is in respect of marriage and divorce. Quite manifestly, our Lord laid down the standard for His followers of the indissolubility of Christian marriage. But in this country the State sanctions divorce with remarriage on various grounds. Here there is a complete contradiction between the two standards; and Christian people should have no doubt

THIS IS OUR FAITH

of their choice. "We must obey God rather than men."⁹

But this is only one example out of many. If Christ is indeed King, Christian people are under an obligation to show their loyalty in always upholding the standard and ideals with which He has enriched the Church.

(5) One other great truth which is consequent upon the fact of the Ascension is that of the essential worth of human nature. If we really believe in our hearts that our manhood

. . . *lives*

On Heaven's eternal throne—

then our whole view of human nature may need to be transformed, with what can only be described as revolutionary results. For if human nature, as such, is seen to be capable of the highest conceivable honour, man as man is dignified more than words can say, and all depreciation of human nature—explicit or implicit—whether in ourselves or in others, is forbidden. For example:

(a) To speak of sin in any form as "only human nature" becomes slander. Although we know what he meant, Alexander Pope can be judged unorthodox when he said "To err is human, to forgive divine." Strictly to err is to be false to one's humanity, and to forgive is to be true to it.

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

"Human nature" is seen in Christ—the condemnation indeed of what in fact we are, but yet the assurance of what we may become. Vice or sin in any form is never "human nature" but rather the corruption of human nature.

(b) Similarly, if we believe from our hearts in the Ascension of Christ, we must think highly of the whole race of man, in fact of man as man; and the practical consequences of such recognition would indeed be tremendous. Here they cannot be elaborated, but it is easy to judge the bearing of this truth upon what is known as the "colour question." There can be no doubt but that many white people hold the view that what are known as "coloured" people really belong to another order of humanity, almost to another species; and that they may appropriately be treated as such; and yet our Lord belonged, humanly speaking, to the near east, being an Asiatic, and not English, and an early realisation was reached of the fact that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth;"¹⁰ and that "in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian nor Scythian,"¹¹ because all share the common humanity which is at the right hand of the throne of God. In passing, it may be well to add that it is, of course, easy for those who are not immediately faced with the colour problem to speak glibly of what should be done

THIS IS OUR FAITH

where that problem is acute; and, of course, it is true that there are backward nations which have years, or it may be centuries, to make up, and we need not deny the gravity of the consequent differences of custom and outlook; but what needs to be stressed is that human nature, wherever we find it, is the human nature which has been glorified; and that to treat anyone who shares that nature as less than a human being, whether as slave or as chattel or as "cannon fodder," is for the Christian a form of infidelity.

(c) But we need not go to distant countries to discover the need for application of this great doctrine of the Ascension. It is probably true that class distinctions are less marked in our own country than they used to be some generations ago; and yet snobbishness dies slowly. It is not the monopoly of any particular class, it reveals itself not in the hall only but in the villa, and in the street; and if it is stupid and wrong to despise a man because he has not got a title, it is just as stupid and wrong to despise him because he has. The Christian should value people for what they are worth, not in cash, but in character, and should believe that every man was judged worth saving by the Son of God, Who is the Son of Man, and shares the humanity which is common to us all.

CHAPTER XI

FROM THENCE HE SHALL COME TO JUDGE THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

*Almighty Judge, how shall poore wretches brook
Thy dreadfull look,
Able a heart of iron to appall
When Thou shalt call
For ev'ry man's peculiar book?*

*What others mean to do I know not well;
Yet I heare tell
That some will turn Thee to some leaves therein
So void of sinne,
That they in merit shall excell.*

*But I resolve, when Thou shalt call for mine,
That to decline,
And thrust a Testament into Thy hand:
Let that be scann'd.
There Thou shalt finde my faults are Thine.*

GEORGE HERBERT

THE expression seems to imply a second Advent of our Lord to the world, after which judgment will be passed upon “the quick”, i.e. those living when He comes, and “the dead,” i.e. those who in all the earlier ages have departed this life. Whatever view be taken of such an “Advent,” judgment, in some form, seems to be implied in many passages in the New Testament. For example, in our Lord’s words:

THIS IS OUR FAITH

"Before Him shall be gathered all nations."¹

"Then shall He reward every man according to his works."²

"The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth."³

In such words our Lord seems to teach an universal judgment; and, consequently, universal survival. So St. Paul understood Him, for he writes: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."⁴ "Each one of us shall give account of himself to God."⁵ And the Church has accepted the doctrine of universal judgment, and includes in her Creed this clause in which we express our belief that "He shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

What is the nature of this judgment which seems to await every human soul?

It is natural to us to think of the analogy of an assize, where there is a prisoner, a charge, pleadings and counter-pleadings, a summing up by the judge, a verdict and a sentence. But the analogy completely fails. At the judgment seat of Christ there need be no evidence, for the facts are all known to the Judge; no pleadings or counter-pleadings, for He is all-righteous as well as all-knowing. No verdict would be needed, for things would be seen as they are. It might even

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

be thought that there would be no sentence, the ultimate issues of human life being of the nature of consequences rather than of penalties or rewards.

What, then, is the judgment? The Greek word comes from a root which signifies to distinguish. Let us suppose the case of a lady who goes into a shop to match some silks. In order that she may distinguish between one and another she takes the different materials to the window, where the clear light of day will reveal what they are. So St. Paul writes: "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, Who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts."⁶ The judgment, in fact, seems to be the revelation to ourselves (and perhaps to others) of things as they really are, or (shall I say?) of ourselves as we really are.

Some years ago it fell to my lot to preach on a weekday evening in the winter at a church in the hilly country of north Lancashire. I arrived in the dark and left in the dark; and it occurred to me that I had had the curious experience of visiting a place without seeing it. Suppose, however, that there had been a thunderstorm on the night of my visit; one flash of lightning might have shown me, in an instant, the situation of Church and houses, and the contour of the

THIS IS OUR FAITH

surrounding hills—all, in fact, that was hidden from my sight.

Thus we read in the New Testament: “As the lightning cometh out of the East and shineth even unto the West, *so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.*”⁷ In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we see—and others see—what we really are at heart.

In one of Charles Dickens’ novels, *Dombey and Son*, an account is given of the fatal illness of Mrs. Skewton, the mother of the second Mrs. Dombey. It was Mrs. Skewton’s endeavour to preserve the appearance of youth into old age, and when she was stricken, Charles Dickens says that “they took her to pieces in very shame and put the little of her that was real on a bed,” stripping her of all the disguises by means of which she had endeavoured to conceal the fact of old age. And then she besought those who were in attendance to hang red curtains across the windows when the doctor came, lest he should note the pallor of her cheeks. The account seems to me to offer a graphic illustration of the character of the judgment. We are all so apt to deceive ourselves; so much we forget—to so much we are blind. We compare ourselves — to our satisfaction — with others whose opportunities may have been far inferior to our own. We accept the kindly verdict of neighbours who know little of our real lives, and

BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST

less of our thoughts and motives. But all these disguises and fancy dresses disappear on the day of judgment; and we see ourselves not as others see us, not even as, now, we see ourselves, but as we are in the sight of God.

If this be so, may not one say without irreverence that what should concern us most is not the judgment but our actual, moral and spiritual state? If I were charged with a crime and were sure of just judgment, the trial would have no terrors for me, *if I knew that I was innocent*. What matters is not the judgment but the condition of the judged. So we read that "if we would judge ourselves we should not be judged."⁸ Or, in other words, if—here and now—we could bring ourselves to see things as they are and to act upon that knowledge, the judgment would be over. The task is not easy, but it is one to which, without delay, the wise will apply themselves; for, if not now, assuredly one day, we shall know even as already we are known.

CHAPTER XII

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST

*Creator Spirit, by whose aid,
The world's foundations first were laid,
Come, visit every pious mind;
Come, pour Thy joys on human kind;
From sin and sorrow set us free,
And make Thy temples worthy Thee.*

JOHN DRYDEN

IN our consideration of the Articles of our Belief, we have now reached the third section of the Creed, and the clause in which is expressed belief in the Holy Ghost, the third Person of the Trinity.

It has been suggested that if primitive man were to watch the departure from this life of one of his fellow men, he would notice that at a certain moment his brother ceased to breathe; and that whereas, before he ceased to breathe, he might be able to speak and see and hear, i.e. he might be in possession of all his faculties, after he ceased to breathe he would be motionless and, apparently, incapable of receiving any impression. He would still have ears, but would be unable to hear, he would still have eyes but would be unable to see; and then, before very long, his body would become disintegrated. And the observer

THIS IS OUR FAITH

would note that the “lifelessness” and “decay” dated from the moment when his friend ceased to breathe; just as, when he first appeared upon the earth, he began, at once, to draw breath. Consequently, it would be natural for him to associate “life” with “breath”; and to feel that there was a mysterious something which came into the body with its first breath and departed when, as we say, the man “breathed his last.” So it came about that men habitually spoke of this mysterious unseen power or principle as man’s “spirit”; for —this is significant—the word which is used for spirit in Hebrew and Greek and Latin is the word of which the original meaning is “wind” or “breath.” So the writer of Ecclesiastes says: “the dust shall return to the earth as it was and the spirit (breath) return unto God who gave it.”

With this experience primitive man might look out on the world, in which he would observe order, activity and movement; and he might draw the conclusion that, as behind the human body there was some mysterious unseen power or principle of life—breath or spirit—so behind the world there must be a similar unseen principle or power. And then—as in the case of the individual (for reasons which I have given) he came to speak of that principle or power as breath or spirit, so in the case of the world he might suppose that there must be some great spirit—the

BELIEF IN THE HOLY GHOST

cause of movement and activity. And he might be the more inclined to adopt the term when he noted that smoke or the branches of trees were driven here and there by an unseen power, which he called breath or wind.

It is not, therefore, surprising that this word “spirit” (originally meaning breath or wind) is the word which human instinct has often employed to denote what we Christians call God; and particularly God at work, or God in action; and this same word Spirit—constantly used in the sacred writings of the Old Testament when God was represented as doing things in the world—was accepted by our Lord and used in His teaching about the being of God. (It is of passing interest to note that in the Acts of the Apostles we are told that one of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon the Church on the day of Pentecost was the sound as of a rushing mighty *wind*.)

So it comes about that such terms as the Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, signifying God at work in the world, came into common theological use, and were eventually employed to denote the Third Person of the Holy Trinity.

When, some years ago, the revised translation of the New Testament was put forth, a list of readings and renderings preferred by the American

THIS IS OUR FAITH

committee, and recorded at their desire, was appended to the revision. One of the preferences of the American committee, which, however, was not adopted in the translation with which we are familiar, was the uniform substitution of the rendering "Holy Spirit" for "Holy Ghost." It is a subject upon which opinions differ. Those who have long been accustomed to the familiar words, "I believe in the Holy Ghost," may not desire a change, while others may agree with the American committee that there are certain obvious disadvantages in the retention of the archaic form—Holy Ghost.

It is sometimes suggested that there is not much reality in the constant expression by the average Christian of his belief in the Holy Spirit. In repeating the Creed he says: "I believe in the Holy Ghost," but does this—it is said—represent a real conviction? In so far as this criticism is true, it suggests a condition that needs to be altered; for there is danger in the constant repetition, especially within the framework of a creed, of words to which no clear meaning or significance is attached. We must therefore give careful consideration to this article of our Faith.

It hardly seems necessary in this little book to say more than a word about the premonitions of

BELIEF IN THE HOLY GHOST

the doctrine of the Holy Spirit which are given us in the Old Testament; but when we read:

“The Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters” (Genesis i. 2):

“And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him” (Numbers xiv. 6):

“Thou gavest also thy good Spirit to instruct them” (Nehemiah ix. 20):

“The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the of fear of the Lord” (Isaiah ii. 2):

“It shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,” (Joel ii. 28),

and similar verses, we may—rightly—interpret such words in the light of the fuller doctrine of God with which the Church was enriched at, and after, the coming of the Lord.

Later on something must be said about the mysterious doctrine of the Holy Trinity; here it must suffice to say that our Christian belief about the Holy Spirit is belief in One Who is God, the Third Person (to use our inadequate human language) of the Holy Trinity. No doubt the order of belief, with the Apostles, was from the First Person of the Trinity to the Second, and from the Second to the Third. They believed in

THIS IS OUR FAITH

Jehovah, in the God Whom they had come to speak of as Father. Gradually, they came to believe in the deity of the One Who, as man, had exercised His ministry among them in the Holy Land. Finally, He had spoken of the coming of the Holy Spirit as of One Divine as Himself; for the coming of the Comforter (He said) was to be *His* coming. Moreover, in the Gospel of St. Mark (iii. 29) and in the Gospel of St. Luke (xii. 10) are recorded some words of our Lord to the effect that—to quote St. Mark's version—"Whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of eternal sin." Into the exact meaning of these words—a perennial matter of dispute—it is not necessary here to enter; but the words themselves, spoken (be it remembered) by our Lord, would clearly be incompatible with any other belief than that of the Godhead of the Holy Spirit. Thus the first disciples came to believe in God the Holy Ghost—in One of Whom we say that He, with the Son—is "equal to the Father as touching His Godhead."

Thus, belief in the Holy Spirit arose within the Church, and gradually faith was fortified. It is evident that the first Christians had spiritual experiences which recalled to them teachings that had fallen from the lips of the Master during the time of His earthly ministry; and, in the attempt

BELIEF IN THE HOLY GHOST

to interpret these experiences, they reached what may have been, at first, a tentative belief in the Holy Spirit; but one which was constantly strengthened by renewed and repeated experiences of His influence and power.

The story of the Day of Pentecost does not read like romance. It is hardly credible that it was an invention of some scribe with a fertile brain. Something evidently happened; and we can picture the Apostles and others, when the immediate manifestations of the Spirit had passed away, recalling such words as "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high."¹ "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth is come, He shall guide you into all truth,"² and then saying to each other: "This must be the fulfilment of the Lord's promise."

(It is, of course, true that at the Day of Pentecost none of the New Testament had yet been written, but the books as we have them record teachings of Christ which, at the time, would be fresh in the minds of the Apostles.)

Then the Apostles had experience of guidance in making decisions. And repeated experiences established conviction. When Matthias was chosen to fill the place in the Apostolic band left vacant by the suicide of Judas Iscariot, the other Apostles cast lots between him and Joseph. This was before the Day of Pentecost. After the Day

THIS IS OUR FAITH

of Pentecost we never find the Apostles determining issues by the method of casting lots. Mindful of the Lord's words: "He shall guide you into all truth," they depended upon the Holy Spirit; and so we find them using such expressions as: "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us,"³ "The Spirit suffered them not,"⁴ and the like.

Or—to take another example of the results of Pentecost—they had the experience of power. It is a historic fact that the first Christians were changed men after the coming of the Spirit. Immediately after the Resurrection they assembled with closed doors for fear of the Jews; but after Pentecost, they hardly seem to have known the meaning of fear; so boldly, and at all costs, did they proclaim the faith. And we can well imagine that, having the experience of Pentecost, they would say to themselves and to each other: "What is the meaning of this change of which we are so conscious?" And then, surely, they would recall the Lord's sayings, such as "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you,"⁵ and "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever,"⁶ and so would interpret their experience and thus become more than ever convinced of the bestowal of the Holy Spirit.

BELIEF IN THE HOLY GHOST

Let us now consider the spheres of operation of the Holy Spirit. There are some well-known lines in one of Wordsworth's sonnets which run thus:

. . . I have felt,
*A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts—a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns
And the round ocean and the living air
And the blue sky—and in the mind of man.*⁷

The lines may suggest to us to look for signs of the Holy Spirit's activity (*a*) in nature, and (*b*) in man.

(*a*) *In nature.* Quite properly we think of God the Holy Spirit as the agent in creation, Who is the source of order, life and beauty in the natural world. Let me quote familiar words: "When Thou lettest Thy breath go forth they shall be made, and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth."⁸ (The word for breath is the word for spirit.) The spirit is the divine agent in creating and sustaining the life of the physical universe. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made and all the hosts of them by the breath of His mouth."⁹

So orderly are the movements of the heavenly bodies that an astronomer can predict the actual

THIS IS OUR FAITH

moment of an eclipse or an occultation which may take place years hence. We cannot contemplate the sky without realising the majesty of what we call the reign of law—although, of course, it is not law that reigns but the Maker of the law. “The spirit of God orders all things sweetly.”¹⁰

(b) But chiefly we shall think of the action of the Holy Spirit upon man, and in the direction of human affairs, especially within the Church. Both in the Old and New Testaments are suggestions that the Holy Spirit is the source of what we sometimes think of as the “natural” endowments of gifted men. Thus:

“The Lord spake unto Moses and said, ‘See I have called by name Bezaleel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the spirit of God in wisdom and in understanding and in knowledge and in all manner of workmanship.’” (Exodus xxi. 1 and 2)

“To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the

BELIEF IN THE HOLY GHOST

interpretation of tongues. But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." (1 Corinthians xii. 8 to 11)

The very word, inspiration, which we apply so often to those who are gifted as musicians or artists contains this same root, signifying breath or spirit; so that the "inspired" artist or musician is, by our very language, judged to be directed by the Spirit of God.

Very many people are conscious of similar direction in their own personal lives:

*Who is there but at times has seen,
While his past days before him stand,
In all the chances that have been,
The guidance of a hidden hand.¹¹*

Such a conviction is not transferable, and I can only claim to speak for myself (although, surely, I speak for many) when I say I have been conscious that my own affairs, in the course of life, have been directed by a power external to myself, and that at times I have only understood the purpose and meaning of certain happenings when, later on, their issue has become apparent.

And even those who are not students of history will know enough of human affairs to be aware that this principle of divine guidance, observable

THIS IS OUR FAITH

in the life of the individual, is observable in the life history of the human race.

Most obvious is this direction by the Holy Spirit in the chequered history of the Christian Church. Thwarted He has been again and again by human folly and wrong doing, but not defeated; and nothing is more wonderful than the way in which so often, under His direction, "the fierceness of man has turned to God's praise." Let anyone consider dispassionately the history of the Christian Church for the first three centuries of our era, or the history of the Church of England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and he must be convinced of the Master's promise that through His Spirit He would be present with the Church unto the end of the age.

When we are thinking of the work of the Holy Spirit upon man, we think particularly of His inspiration of the writers, and, one might add, the editors of the Scriptures. Although the Church has nowhere defined the mode of inspiration of the writers of the books, her undoubted belief in what is sometimes spoken of as Biblical inspiration finds ample confirmation in the marvellous history of the Bible, and in its power to convert and to edify. There is no reference to the subject in the Apostles' Creed, but there is one clause in the Nicene Creed, in which it is said

BELIEF IN THE HOLY GHOST

that the Holy Ghost “spake by the prophets.” The phrase is suggestive, as indicating both the human and Divine element in the sacred writings. It suggests the co-operation of the writers and of the Spirit of God. Similarly, in the second Epistle of St. Peter, ch. i. v. 21, are the words: “No prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spake of God, being moved by the Holy Ghost.” Here again, the co-operative work of the Divine and human agents in the writing of the Scriptures is indicated.

Although the purpose of this reference is to make it clear that the Bible constitutes one great sphere of activity of the Holy Spirit, it may be worth while to point out that inspiration, as applied to Scripture, does not mean the coercing of the human will by Divine power, but rather that the human agents, in their varying degrees, were willingly subject to the direction of the Holy Spirit. But the human agent, though inspired by the Spirit, yet retained his personal characteristics of style, simplicity, eloquence, accuracy and the like, with the result that there is no dead level of inspiration throughout the Bible. No one would suggest that inspiration was received in equal measure by the writer of the book of Esther, and by the writer of the Gospel according to St. John. Consequently in our study of the Bible, it is not really a wise

THIS IS OUR FAITH

plan to read the books straight through from Genesis to Revelation, but rather to spend our time and care chiefly upon those books in which it is evident that inspiration is at a high level.

Again, through the action of the Holy Spirit, men receive not guidance only but enabling grace.

It has often seemed to me that one of the many ways in which the difference between a converted and an unconverted man is shown is that the converted man is one who really believes in Divine grace and power, while the unconverted man is one who (although he may speak lightly of "the grace of God," and use such expressions as "with the help of the Lord") does not, in his heart, believe that he can depend upon a power other than his own.

But the Lord's promises are sure. Divine grace is a fact. The power of the Holy Spirit is real. We can have it if we will.

It is upon the Holy Spirit that we depend for the efficacy of the great sacramental rites of the Church. For example, in the service for the Baptism of Infants, before the child is baptised, a prayer is said in which come the words: "Give Thy Holy Spirit to this infant that he may be born again and be made an heir of everlasting salvation." And after the baptism comes another prayer, in which are the words: "We yield Thee

BELIEF IN THE HOLY GHOST

hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased Thee to regenerate this Infant with Thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for Thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into Thy Holy Church.”

In regard to confirmation, what is suggested in the Order of 1662 is made very clear in the alternative order proposed in 1928. In the old form of service, the Laying-on of Hands, i.e. confirmation, is immediately preceded by a prayer containing the following words: “Strengthen them, we beseech thee, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost the Comforter, and daily increase in them thy manifold gifts of grace; the spirit of wisdom and understanding; the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength; the spirit of knowledge and true godliness; and fill them, O Lord, with the spirit of thy holy fear, now and for ever.”

The words used as each candidate is confirmed are: “Defend, O Lord, this thy Child with thy heavenly grace, that he may continue thine for ever; and daily increase in thy Holy Spirit more and more, until he come unto thy everlasting kingdom.”

In the alternative order, the preface contains the account of a confirmation as given in the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, concluding with the words: “Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy

THIS IS OUR FAITH

Ghost.” The preface proceeds: “The scripture here teacheth us that a special gift of the Holy Spirit is bestowed through laying on of hands with prayer.”

Once more, reference may be made to the Ordinal. When a clergyman is ordained priest, at the laying-on of hands, the Bishop says: “Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a Priest in the Church of God now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands.” Similar words are used at the consecration of a Bishop.

In the order of the Administration of the Lord’s Supper, or Holy Communion, although the omission is not to be viewed too seriously, it is to be regretted that there is no explicit invocation of the Holy Spirit in the prayer of consecration. In the alternative order proposed in 1928, the following words form part of the consecration prayer: “Hear us, O merciful Father, we most humbly beseech thee, and with Thy holy and life-giving Spirit vouchsafe to bless and sanctify both us and these Thy gifts of bread and wine, that they may be unto us the Body and Blood of Thy Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, to the end that we, receiving the same, may be strengthened and refreshed both in body and soul.”

These references have been made to illustrate

BELIEF IN THE HOLY GHOST

the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to some of the principal means of grace. It may be well to add a few words in regard to the share which the Christian disciple must take in the "appropriation" of the grace which is bestowed through sacramental and other means; for although it be true to say that our own willingness and ability to co-operate are the gift of God, it would be a mistake to think that man is to be a merely passive recipient of the grace of God. Here, as elsewhere, the principle is true that God helps those who help themselves. The point can be made clear by illustration. Let me suppose the case of someone who has been fulfilling an evening engagement at a distance of five miles from the place where he lives. When the time comes to go home he finds that he has missed the last bus, and has no means of transport. He is faced with a journey of five miles on a cold dark night. Then, unexpectedly, a passing motorist offers him a lift. He gets into the car, and is taken home without any effort on his own part. This would not rightly illustrate the working of divine grace.

But suppose on a similar occasion, a friend appeared on the scene, and said: "Are you going to such and such a place; so am I; let us walk together." Then he has to walk the five miles, but the presence of his friend is a real help to him. It makes the way seem short, and journey

THIS IS OUR FAITH

seem pleasant. Indeed, it may be true that when the traveller eventually reaches home he finds himself much less tired than if he had had the solitary walk.

This will at least be a truer illustration of the work of divine grace. It is not that we are relieved of the necessity of effort; we still have to trudge along, but we are helped—enabled—by the presence and companionship of a Friend.

When we are considering our belief in one Person of the Holy Trinity we ought to have in mind that we should do wrong if we were to draw sharp distinctions between the Persons of the Godhead, or to attempt, so to speak, to set up boundaries within which the activity of one or other Person would be confined. There is a doctrine known to theologians, called the doctrine of the Perichoresis; the word is meant to suggest that the activity of one Person involves the activity of Three; and in the New Testament it is significant that St. Paul can speak of the Holy Spirit and of the Spirit of Jesus, meaning, in either case, the same thing. Herein he is following our Lord Who spoke of the Father sending “the Comforter in My Name,” and said also “I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you.”¹² The coming of the Holy Spirit is the coming of the Spirit of Jesus—His coming.

The way in which our own belief in the Holy

BELIEF IN THE HOLY GHOST

Spirit will become real will be the way of experience. We must look for Him where He is to be found—

In the created universe, in its order and beauty:

In our own lives, when we are led along a path which unexpectedly, perhaps, leads to the goal:

In the fulfilment of any task which seemed to be beyond our powers, but which we were able to achieve when we had claimed the help of the Spirit of God:

In the sense that even the turbulence and rebellion which characterise this age can be shaped, and even now are being shaped into an order which may ultimately secure a better fulfilment of the Divine will, and therefore the greater welfare of mankind:

In the current history of the Church, whenever we see signs of renewed life and interest (and the story of the Church is one of constant revival).

In all such cases we have evidence, if we will but recognise the fact, to confirm our belief in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life.

A NOTE ON THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY TRINITY

Some years ago I was living in a town where the Vicar of the principal Church was a man of marked ability and withal prominent in the Diocese. He told me that he liked to arrange to take his holiday immediately after Whitsunday; and when I asked him why he chose a date so early in the year, he explained that one of his reasons was that he would be absent from his parish, and therefore would not have to preach the sermons, on Trinity Sunday; for he found it so extremely difficult to deal with the doctrine of the Trinity. No doubt other clergy find the same difficulty, and sometimes manage to solve their problem by preaching a sermon, for example, on the general subject of the worship of God, which is suggested by some of the scriptures appointed for the day; and yet I feel that this is hardly a courageous course. The Church holds, and upholds, the doctrine of the Trinity, and her ministers must be prepared to teach it. As I shall indicate in a moment, our failure to give an explanation at once complete and lucid, of this mysterious doctrine, may not be a culpable failure; but we must do the best that we can.

BELIEF IN THE HOLY GHOST

Although the doctrine is not declared in the Apostles' Creed—but only implied—it would not seem right wholly to ignore it in a book bearing the title: *This is our Faith*. All, however, that I will attempt to offer are a few thoughts which in the past have been helpful to myself.

I take as "text" some words from the Athanasian Creed: "The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and yet they are not three Gods but one God." It would, I suppose, be impossible to have a more simple and straightforward statement—it is not an explanation—of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The statement is in two halves. Let me take them in turn. The first half is a declaration that "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God."

I need not spend time in the attempt to argue the statement that God is—God the Father—the Creator. To this proposition all theists would subscribe. Then it is our Christian belief that God became incarnate in Jesus Christ; as St. John puts it: "the Word was with God, the Word was God . . . the Word became flesh." Gradually the Apostles, who had accompanied with Jesus Christ of Nazareth, came to believe that He was, and is, "God of God." The fullness of this belief may not have been reached until after Pentecost; for "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost."¹

THIS IS OUR FAITH

Then, as a result of their experience and in the attempt to interpret that experience, they came to believe in the Holy Ghost: of Whom Christ spoke in terms implying Deity.

In such ways, the first Christians would, at last, find themselves able to say "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God"; and pursuing a similar course of thought and experience, we may be able, or become able, to make that same declaration our own. Let us have this, then, in mind; and, for a moment, leave it there.

We turn to the second part of the verse which I have quoted from the Athanasian Creed: "And yet they are not three Gods, but one God." As soon as ever we begin to think seriously on the subject we shall find that we must be monotheists, that we cannot believe in more than one God. For to us God does not mean some shadowy spiritual being, who in some way presides over the destiny of our particular nation. There is no such being as the English God or the German God; or any national and tribal God. No doubt there was a time when the Hebrews looked upon Jehovah as the God of their tribe and nation; other nations and tribes, such as Moab and Ammon, having their own "Gods." But all such ideas have been discarded and have passed away from the minds of intelligent people. By the term God we mean the supreme being, the

BELIEF IN THE HOLY GHOST

highest, the infinite; and manifestly when the word is used in that sense—the only true sense—“polytheism” becomes nonsense. To speak of three Gods, when the word God is properly understood, would be as sensible as to speak of three mountains, each of which was higher than the other two—which is absurd. In fact as soon as the real meaning of the word God is grasped, it is clear that we must believe in one God. This fact then—like the other—we will keep in mind.

So that the situation is that (shall I say?) in two distinct regions of the mind, we have these two complementary beliefs:

(a) That the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and

(b) That they are not three Gods but one God.

And that is the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

But, obviously, the subject cannot be left at that point. Any intelligent person will say: “How do you propose to reconcile these apparently contradictory statements?” And therein lies our difficulty. It must at once be confessed that with our present faculties any full, complete reconciliation is beyond us. Those who have taught this doctrine—notably St. Augustine—have used many illustrations or analogies in hope that these might be of some service to students of the doctrine. St. Augustine, for example, used such illustrations as the spring of water, the river

THIS IS OUR FAITH

which comes from the spring, and the glass of water drawn from the river. The water is the same in each case, but the glass-full is not the river, and the river is not the spring. Or he takes a tree as an illustration, and speaks of the root, the trunk and the branches. They are all one wood, but the root is not the trunk, and the trunk is not the branches. There are many other analogies. The human unit is the family, father, mother and child. A man himself, with body, soul and spirit, is a trinity in unity. Or even cruder illustrations could be used. The life of Mr. Gladstone is written in three volumes; each volume is a book, and yet they are not three books but one book. Three men may join in partnership to establish some undertaking or firm; and while they are three in one sense, they are one in that they have a common aim and method, and one can speak for the others. All such illustrations are open to easy criticism; and if pressed, they will break down. Yet I think they are not without value, at least as indicating to the enquirer that the doctrine of the Trinity is not simply bad arithmetic. In these comparatively unimportant realms of the region of thought the experience of "trinity in unity" is already frequent; and we may believe that the mystery of the Godhead may one day be perfectly revealed to us.

Meantime, there are one or two further con-

BELIEF IN THE HOLY GHOST

siderations to be urged. It has sometimes been suggested that this doctrine involves a needless and awkward complication in our understanding of God; as if it were easier to be an Unitarian than a Trinitarian. But this is not really the case. For instance, one of the first texts that we learned as children was the text "God is love." God is, that is to say, essentially love; but love implies an object; and if we were to try and conceive of God before, or apart from, all creation, existing as an Unit in solitary grandeur, it would be impossible to think of Him as essentially love. On the other hand, if within the Godhead there is a plurality of persons (to employ necessarily imperfect language) we can think of relations—and therefore, of the relation of love within the Godhead: "the Father loveth the Son."

Indeed, many people think that it is the doctrine of the Trinity which makes it possible for us to conceive of God as personal. Dr. Illingworth, writing on this doctrine, said: "If we are to think of God as personal at all, we must of necessity involve some kind of plurality in the conception, for personality implies this. A person is as essentially a social, as he is an individual being: he cannot be realised, he cannot become his true self, apart from society; and, personality having this plural implication, solitary personality is a contradiction in terms."²

THIS IS OUR FAITH

The doctrine of the Trinity enables us to conceive relationship within the Godhead, and thus to apply to God the attribute of personality.

Again, if we have to confess that the full significance of the nature and being of God eludes us, this should not be a sorrowful confession, for is it not true to say that if we were capable of a complete comprehension of what God essentially is, He could not fulfil our desire?

In fact, we ought to welcome mystery in religion. Is not one of the charms of a great cathedral that we cannot see it all at once? There is always something more, something beyond. We take a cross view, and see through columns and arches further columns and arches; and always much is hidden from our sight; and gladly we would have it so. The mystery of such a great building appeals to us more than some plain rectangular structure, the whole of which is to be seen as soon as we pass the threshold. And so it is with God.

*O Thou above all blessing blest,
O'er thanks exalted far,
Thy very greatness is a rest,
To weaklings as we are.*

BELIEF IN THE HOLY GHOST

*For when we feel the praise of Thee
A task beyond our powers,
We say A perfect God is He,
And He is wholly ours.*

Moreover, in the statement which I have quoted from the Athanasian Creed, if we can accept it, we have all that we need to know. It is enough to be sure that there is one God, one supreme being to whom the whole world, the whole universe, all the universes, are subject; and to know that He is our God—our heavenly Father; and that Jesus Christ came, in Whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, so that God is our Saviour, and that the One Whose teaching is recorded for us in the New Testament speaks with the authority of God; and that the Holy Spirit, the source of guidance and power, is with us, giving us (because He is God) sure guidance and enabling power.

Here is the inestimable practical value of the doctrine of “God in three Persons, Blessed Trinity.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

*For He, wandering unarm'd save by the spirit's flame
In few years with few friends founded a world-empire
Wider than Alexander's and more enduring
Since from His death it took its everlasting life.
His kingdom is God's kingdom and His holy temple
Not in Athens or Rome, but in the heart of man.*

ROBERT BRIDGES: "The Testament of Beauty."

THERE are some words which—as soon as we hear them—present to our minds clear and definite pictures; sometimes reviving memories, sometimes exciting hopes. Such words are "home," "springtime," "holidays," and so forth. There are other words which affect us similarly, though less happily, such words as "fog," "hay-fever," "prison," and the like.

It may be worth while to conjecture the reaction (to use the jargon of the day) of the average Churchgoer, and of the average man who is not a Churchgoer, to the sound of the word "Church?" Of what does he instinctively think? What picture is presented to his mind? What memories are recalled?

To this question there may be many answers. Do some at once think of an institution of which they know little, but of which they have been

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

assured by the orators in the park that it forms a barrier to the realisation of their social aspirations—a manifest falsehood? Do others think of services which, from time to time, they attend, not too willingly, nor, perhaps, with subsequent satisfaction? Or do they think only of the clergy?

“My heart leaps up when I behold a rainbow in the sky.” Are there those whose heart leaps up when the magic words “the Church” are uttered; because to them they signify the joyous fellowship of those who are friends in Jesus Christ; or because they recall hours of worship in which, forgetting earth, they walked in heavenly places? Or because they denote the comradeship of devoted service offered to God for the salvation of a tottering world? We may wonder. We may have misgivings.

The blunt fact is that neither in theory nor in practice have we Christian people at all adequately presented “the Church”—with all that it signifies and implies—to the world. Neither in theory nor in practice. We have not taught it sufficiently—nor lived it loyally. It will be well to consider, briefly, this double failure.

(i) To many people—often to many Christian people—“the Church” appears as a kind of “extra” in the “curriculum” of Christianity. Let me illustrate: your boy may be at school, and you

THIS IS OUR FAITH

wish him to learn to play the violin. The master will tell you that it is possible for your wish to be met; but your son will be taught to play the violin out of school hours, and an additional fee will be charged. Learning the violin is proper, and for some people it is desirable, but it is abnormal—it is outside the syllabus. So there are many people who judge that Christianity means believing in God, and saying prayers, and living a decent straightforward kindly life. Then—they would say—if people are so minded, they may join with those whose feelings are like their own, in the fellowship and in the corporate worship of the Christian society. But this is supposed to be a matter of personal choice. In an article in the *Radio Times* some while ago, this theory of the Church—as a kind of “optional extra”—was propounded.

But this is a capital blunder. Our Lord said of His foremost disciple: “Thou art Peter—the Rock man—and upon this rock (let me, without controversy, suggest that the ‘rock’ meant the confession of faith in the deity of Christ) I will build my Church.”¹ Nothing can be more clear than that the Lord did not come to earth to enunciate certain principles and leave them, so to speak, to take their chance of currency in a busy and pre-occupied world; He came to redeem that world, and upon the historic Church of the people of

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

God—the Jewish Church—to establish the Catholic Church, the Fellowship of the grace and truth which “came by Jesus Christ.”

Let me suppose a visitor to our shores from another planet, who begins to study religion as he finds it here. After a time he comes to us and says: “I am perplexed. I hear religious people discussing the doctrines of their religion. They speak of the Atonement, but with differing voices; they give me a number of distinct interpretations. It is so with the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible, which is explained to me in a bewildering variety of terms. Similarly, some believe in hell, and some do not; and, of those who do believe, some speak of material fire, and others interpret the fire metaphorically. I am perplexed. If I should desire to become a Christian, who can tell me what I must believe?”

Our answer is ready to hand. We shall tell him that the test of belief for the Christian is contained in a document named the Apostles' Creed; we shall tell him that therein he will not find any formal statement of the doctrine of the Atonement, or of the inspiration of the Bible, or of future punishment, and that Christian people have large latitude in respect of those, and other, matters of belief. But we shall tell him that in this short summary of essential and fundamental Christian belief there is an article in which reference

THIS IS OUR FAITH

is made to the Holy Catholic Church. That is not secondary; it is not an optional extra; it is something vital, and fundamental to Christianity properly understood.

Suppose our friend to be satisfied for the moment, and to leave us. In time he returns and says that he has made up his mind that he wishes to become a Christian; and he asks how his wish can be fulfilled. Again our answer lies to hand. We shall tell him that we know no way in which he can become a Christian except by baptism, wherein he will be made a member of the Holy Catholic Church, in which—when he says the Creed—he expresses his belief.

In fact, in Christian discipleship, men do not (so to speak) end with the Church, if they feel so disposed: they begin with the Church; for there is no way in which anyone can become a Christian without joining the Christian Society—what one of our Collects calls “the Fellowship of Christ’s religion.”

• • • •
What is the Church? A common answer would be “the whole congregation of Christian people dispersed throughout the world”—all, that is to say, who have been made members of Christ, by baptism into His Body.

Except in one respect, about which a word or

THIS IS OUR FAITH

The same unity of Christ and His members is enforced elsewhere, not only by St. Paul but by St. John the Divine, wherever the Church is represented as the *Bride of Christ*. For example, passages are quoted in the Marriage Service, in which St. Paul emphasises the unity “betwixt Christ and His Church.” There is also a notable passage at the end of the Book of the Revelation, in which again the Church is represented as the Bride of Christ, adorned for her husband.

In our thought of the Church, then, and in giving—whether to ourselves or to others—some answer to the question: “What do you mean by the Church?” we must invariably associate with the thought of those who are baptised and thus made members of the Church, the thought of Him into Whom they are baptised, and of Whom they are living members. Nor must it be forgotten that “the Church” includes not only those members of Christ who are living upon earth, but the vast host of those who have passed into the other world. For “whether we live or die we are the Lord’s.”

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It may be well to remind ourselves that this Church is not a human invention. The Church exists in the world to-day not because human

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

beings are gregarious and like to associate with each other, nor even because at some point in history they thought well to combine in order to propagate religious truth and to give currency to religious standards of life. The Church is of divine appointment, as St. John indicates when he speaks of seeing the Holy City “coming down from heaven, having the glory of God.” We shall miss so much if we only think of the Church as yet another human society of man’s device. In very familiar words:

*The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is His new creation
By water and the Word.*

And it is this conviction—that the Church “is His creation”—that justifies and demands the qualifying adjectives by which, in the two great Creeds, the Church is described. One: holy: Catholic: Apostolic. These are the “notes” of the Church.

Unity. There can be but one Body of Christ. If, as is the case, many groups of Christians in this world are not in communion with each other, the fact is to be deplored. But those groups which maintain the essentials of Church life are, in fact, one, as belonging to the one Church—and they have to learn to behave as one. We may

THIS IS OUR FAITH

speak of “churches” (in the plural) when we are thinking of particular churches in a particular place—St. John’s Church, St. Peter’s Church, St. James’s Church, and so forth. Or we may speak of “churches” in the plural—for convenience—when we are thinking of the South African Church, and the English Church, and the Australian Church, and so forth. But manifestly it is utterly wrong, if the Church is, in fact, the Body of Christ, to signify by the use of the plural that there can be several separate and distinct Churches. “The body,” St. Paul says, “is one”; and the Body of Christ is—must be—one.

The unity of the Church is so vital for the fulfilment of her witness and her work, that all Christian people do well “seriously to lay to heart the great dangers that we are in through our unhappy divisions.” But though the ideal can, without difficulty, be brought before our imagination, the steps by which the ideal may be reached are less easy to find; and it is sometimes the case that enthusiasts begin to build upon very insecure foundations. Some people, with what may be almost a laudable impatience, are ready to act as if doctrinal agreement had already been reached; and the danger of such a course is that by acting as if the goal had been reached, when, in fact, it has not, they may actually postpone the day of that agreement in the faith upon which

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

alone a reunited Christendom may be built. Some steps, however, are clear.

Faithful prayer for the reunion of Christendom should be offered regularly by all Christian people; and in order that this may be more than a pious aspiration, most people will do well to fix a particular day in the week upon which they will offer such prayers.

Again, a necessary preliminary to agreement is understanding; and a real effort to understand the convictions of those from whom we differ will lead us along the path towards union. Indeed, it may lead to the discovery that there is already a larger measure of agreement than we had supposed.

Once more—although there is much less need for this to be said than there was in the last generation—the careful maintenance of the rule of courtesy and friendliness towards those who have differing religious convictions is not only an obligation which rests upon the Christian man or woman, but tends to produce that unity of the spirit which is the bond of peace.

Lastly—and most important of all—it is surely true that reunion will eventually be achieved not so much by the way of negotiation as by the way of sanctification. We are, in fact, one in Christ Jesus, and the nearer we draw to Him, the nearer we draw to each other, even as the spokes of a

THIS IS OUR FAITH

wheel approach each other as they approach the axle at which they meet. The goal will be reached when it can be said with truth that

All are one in Thee, for all are Thine.

Holy. The Church is Holy, because it is the Church of Christ—His Body, indwelt by His Spirit—and is for all its members a “school of holiness.” By our action, her holiness (like her unity) has been terribly marred: but yet the Creed is right. Tarnished gold is still gold.

In this connection it is supremely important that the members of the Christian Church should be careful always to uphold the highest standards of human conduct. There is a temptation to which Christian people are prone, and to which some succumb, the temptation to come to terms with the world. Indeed, we are sometimes charged by those who would represent themselves as well-wishers to the cause of Christ, to be reasonable, not to ask the impossible, to make concessions to human frailty, and so forth. In this way (it is said) the Church is more likely to win the adherence of the average man than if she upholds standards which would appear to be beyond his reach. This may sound plausible but, nevertheless, it constitutes a temptation. It is the very temptation which came to our Lord in the Wilderness, when the Tempter showed Him all

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

the kingdoms of the world, and offered them at a price. The price to be paid was the worship of Satan himself. It was, in fact, as if the Tempter had said to Him: "Worship me. Admit my sovereignty; lower your standards; make allowances for human weakness, and the kingdoms of the world are yours."

Our Lord's answer was: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve."³ Or, in other words, "I must uphold no standard lower than the highest."

Like Master, like servants. It is not the Church's business to make concessions to human weakness, rather it is hers to uphold the most lofty ideals, towards which, enabled by the grace which it is the Church's task to mediate, men and women may aspire.

Indeed the Church would make a capital blunder if she were to try and win the world by conforming to the world's standards. The very worldlings themselves would despise her, for ever from the human heart comes the plea:

O set me up upon the rock that is higher than I.

Catholic. The Church of Christ is Catholic, by contrast with the Jewish Church, by which it was preceded. (The opposite of Catholic is Jewish—not Protestant). The Church of Christ is Catholic because she is not for one race, but for all races

THIS IS OUR FAITH

and all ages, and is charged to proclaim to all mankind the whole body of Christian truth.

It is indeed true that the great task for which the Church exists is to evangelise the world, and to proclaim to all nations the whole counsel of God. More will be said of this later, but it is the very purpose for which the Church exists; and any Christian who is indifferent to the cause of Christian missionary work in other lands—in all lands as well as in our own—has signally failed to understand the implications of this clause of the Apostles' Creed.

Apostolic. The Church is Apostolic because it has maintained continuous life since it was built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, and because it “continues steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers.”

What is implied in this may be indicated by reference to what is sometimes known as the “Lambeth Quadrilateral,” namely the Scriptures, the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, and the historic Episcopate. It is necessary to contend for each item of the Lambeth Quadrilateral, of which the last, the historic Episcopate, is the one about which there has been most dispute. In this connection some words may be quoted from the report of the committee on the unity of the

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

Church, appointed at the time of the Lambeth Conference of 1930. Those who were responsible for the report wrote:

“Without entering into the discussion of the theories which divide scholars, we may affirm shortly that we see no reason to doubt the statement made in the Preface to our Ordinal that ‘from the Apostles’ time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ’s Church: Bishops, Priests and Deacons.’ Whatever variety of system may have existed in addition in the earlier age, it is universally agreed that by the end of the second century episcopacy had no effective rival. Among all the controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries the episcopal ministry was never a subject of dispute. We may therefore reasonably claim that it is ‘historic’ in a sense in which no other now can ever be. The Episcopate occupies a position which is, in point of historic development, analogous to that of the Canon of Scripture and of the Creeds. In the first days there was no Canon of New Testament Scripture, for the books afterwards included in it were still being written. For a time different Churches had different writings which they regarded as authoritative. The Canon was slowly formed, and the acceptance of a single

THIS IS OUR FAITH

Canon throughout the Church took several generations. So, too, the Apostles' Creed is the result of a process of growth which we can in large measure trace. If the Episcopate, as we find it established universally by the end of the second century, was the result of a like process of adaptation and growth in the organism of the Church, that would be no evidence that it lacked divine authority, but rather that the life of the Spirit within the Church had found it to be the most appropriate organ for the functions which it discharged."

Such is the Church—the Divine Society—the great fellowship of all who have been made members of the Incarnate Son of God.

The Purpose and Function of the Church.

The Church may be considered to have both a Godward and a manward function.

(a) The primary task of the Church is ceaselessly to maintain the worship of God, and he must be a listless and unimaginative person who is unmoved by the thought of the constant maintenance by the Church on earth, as by the Church in Heaven, of its never-ceasing tribute of praise.

*We thank Thee that Thy Church unsleeping
While earth rolls onwards into light
Through all the world her watch is keeping
And rests not now by day or night.*

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

*As o'er each continent and island
The dawn leads on another day,
The voice of prayer is never silent,
Nor dies the strain of praise away.*

*The sun that bids us rest is waking
Our brethren 'neath the western sky,
And hour by hour fresh lips are making
Thy wondrous doings heard on high.*

(b) Then it is the Church's function to carry on the work of Christ in the world; and this means the redemption of the whole of humanity—the redemption not only of all men, but of the whole man. "I pray God your whole body, soul and spirit be preserved blameless."⁴

Body—soul (or mind)—and spirit.

Her task will include the redemption of the body. All that this means it is impossible to describe in detail. I want to suggest, however, that if she follows the example of her Lord, the Church not only must not be indifferent to men's bodily welfare, but must seek to promote for everyone, everywhere, such conditions of bodily life as may seem consonant with the will of God for His children, and may allow each individual the opportunity of healthy physical development.

In a simpler civilisation, it was comparatively easy for the Church, by direct means, to promote these ends—to feed, clothe, and tend those in

THIS IS OUR FAITH

need; but in a complex civilisation such as ours—e.g. in the life of a great city—the fulfilment of this task is by no means simple. In many respects the Church has now to act through agents—e.g. through the agency of a City Council, an Assistance Committee, a Hospital Board. This is inevitably the case; but members of the Church—mindful of the Church's obligation in this respect—must be ready not only to support those who have directly to minister to men's bodily needs; but also, if the opportunity arises, themselves to serve in this ministry, on such councils and committees.

Further, the Churchman will feel an obligation to lend active support to all those enterprises (if wisely conceived and fulfilled) which are loosely spoken of as social reform; remembering throughout the great principles of the value of the individual, and of unselfish service as the keynote of Christian conduct.

The Church, which is concerned with the redemption of the whole man, must care for the development and enlightenment of man's mind, and must seek to increase human capacity to wonder and admire. In the past the Church has been the pioneer in the work of education; and, true to her tradition, she must remember to-day that the right development of the mind, the right stimulus to the emotions, is not less a sacred task

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

than the strengthening and refreshing of the spirit. This is a principle which in elementary and secondary education must guide the conduct of Church people. Do not let "secular" education be contrasted with religious instruction—when both are sacred.

It hardly needs to be said that among the purposes for which the Church exists, the most significant is the redemption and sanctification of man's spirit; and here she, like her Master, has indeed to point the way, but also to impart the grace whereby the disciples may be enabled to go forward along the path of true discipleship.

She has to point the way. Very often it has happened, in some great social, national or international crisis, that people have said, "Cannot the Church do something?" But sometimes it has seemed that this cry is only the petulant outburst of those who, at other times, have never expected the Church to do anything, nor backed her efforts. I should assert emphatically that it is not the function of the Church to find for men an easy way out of the scrapes in which they have become involved just because the teaching of the Church has been persistently ignored. Our Lord was once asked to intervene in a family quarrel, and declined to do so: "Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you?" But when

THIS IS OUR FAITH

He added, "Take heed and beware of covetousness,"⁵ He gave a very pertinent hint to the disputants that if they had attended to that principle, this family quarrel would not have arisen. The Church is not to be the operating surgeon in an emergency; hers is rather the function of the health committee. Her aim must be to prevent spiritual disaster rather than to intervene dramatically—or melodramatically—when the crash has come.

And to this end she must be forever preaching ideal standards of conduct—and practising what she preaches. I am well aware that there are those who consider the Church to be out of touch with the thought and practice of the modern world, to be lacking in sympathy with human weaknesses. It is often suggested that the Church would gain in influence if, in certain respects, she were less rigid in her insistence on "impracticable standards." "Why should gambling be condemned?" "Why should not the Church come to terms with the advocates of birth control?" Such is the plea; but the Church would be wrong if she entertained the proposal. We do not find that the Lord Himself ever accommodated His teaching or standards to the foibles or frailties of society in His day. He lost followers because of His fidelity to the truth. They went back (it is said) and walked no more with Him.

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Church is never going to help the world by becoming like the world, but rather by being unlike the world. The Church has to point the way, and Christ is the way, and she can endorse no standard lower than His.

Again the Church has to mediate to her members the enabling grace of God. And, through various means, of which the most typical and significant is the great sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, she offers Him, as He offered Himself, for the satisfaction of all the spiritual needs of humanity—for pardon, for power and for peace.

At this point something must be said of the sacramental principle, seeing that the Church is the home of the chief sacraments, and is herself sacramental in character. In the Church Catechism, we have the definition of a sacrament in the following question and answer:

“What meanest thou by this word Sacrament?”

“I mean an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ Himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof.”

The principle which underlies this definition is the principle that the outward and visible may

THIS IS OUR FAITH

contain and convey the inward and spiritual. It is a principle which has endless applications; inevitably, because we ourselves, being compact of body and soul, serve to illustrate the principle. Whatever the soul of man may be—and we must all be convinced that our humanity is not the sum of so much carbon, so much phosphorus, so much water, and so forth—it has no substance, as e.g. the heart and lungs of a man have substance. It is not located in his head or in his chest or in any place. Its association with the body is not to be explained, but remains a mystery; but it is quite certain that the man's soul finds expression in his body. The late Bishop Charles Gore once said that Bishop B. F. Westcott's face was in itself a sufficient refutation of materialism.

Men and women being what they are, this sacramental principle is something which we encounter at every turn; namely, the expression of the invisible through the visible. We find it in creation—"The heavens declare the glory of God." We meet it day by day in our association with others. "A handshake," it was once said, "is the sacrament of friendship, a kiss the sacrament of love."

And this principle, constantly finding expression in the life of humanity, finds supreme expression in the great truth of the Incarnation. In the words of the Athanasian Creed, "as the

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ.” To all appearance the little Child in the manger at Bethlehem is a human child, to all appearance He is no more; but “veiled in flesh the godhead see.” Here, once more, the invisible is expressed through the visible.

Hence the common expression that sacraments are an extension of the Incarnation. In them the same principle is illustrated; the outward and visible somehow contains and conveys the inward and spiritual. The principle is apparent in the two Dominical sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion; and the Catechism explicitly declares in either case what is the outward and visible, and what the inward and spiritual. The same principle is apparent in the “five commonly called Sacraments” to which reference is made in Article 25. In each case it is not difficult to see the outward and visible sign and the inward and spiritual grace. But as we have seen, the sacramental principle has manifold applications, and although the two sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion have a special dignity in view of the belief that both were instituted by our Lord, we should be lacking in imagination if we were to speak of two sacraments or even of seven, as if therein the list was exhausted. The Bible is sacramental; it is written by men, it has its human side, but the men who wrote and edited it were

THIS IS OUR FAITH

inspired by the Holy Spirit, and so their words convey divine inspiration.

Public worship may be considered to be sacramental in that it has the outward sign of "two or three gathered together in Christ's Name," and an inward grace; for did He not say: "There am I in the midst of them"?⁶ Similarly we may speak of the Church as sacramental, for the members of the Church are human beings—outward and visible—but the Church is the Church of Jesus Christ—the Head of the Body—and is indwelt by the Spirit of God, and thus is a divine society.

There is great value to mankind in the sacramental principle not only because the outward sign is a means whereby we receive inward grace, but also because it is "a pledge to assure us thereof." Thus the Christian man, when he is confirmed, knows that he has received the Holy Spirit, and that it will be for him to stir up the gift that is in him through the laying on of hands. Likewise a priest, though conscious of his own unworthiness and incapacity, recalls with thankfulness that he did indeed receive from God, through the ministry of the Church, his commission and authority when it was said to him: "Receive the Holy Spirit for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands."

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

Such is the purpose—such the functions—of the Church. To redeem the whole man—body, mind and spirit—to point the pathway to the celestial City of God—and to nourish the life of her members, so that, knowing Him and His will, and in the light of His truth, they may copy the Pattern which Jesus has set, in the power which Jesus will give. And she has to fulfil this service not for one nation or race only, but for all mankind.

It is to be feared that we have not made it clear that for every man Christianity—being a Christian—means, and always must mean, active membership of the Church; this and nothing less.

(2) In the second place it would seem that in practice we have not made the truth about the Church evident to the eyes of the world. What numbers of Christian people there are (people who might strongly resent the suggestion that their Christianity was defective) who fail to recognise that membership of Christ is, in fact, membership of the Church which is His Body; and, consequently, how many of them live their lives (albeit moral lives) aloof from the fellowship, worship and activities of the Church—thus “advertising” to the world the very mistake which I have tried to correct—that Christianity is one thing and Churchmanship another.

Again, how many Christians, alas (who do not

THIS IS OUR FAITH

make this particular blunder) fail to give the impression that there are bands of love which join them to all their fellow Christians? The late Bishop Gore once said that the word "ecclesiastical" ought to suggest at once the idea which is suggested by the word "brotherly." Too often this is not the case. Let me give an example that will ever linger in my mind.

A young clergyman had been ministering in a large town parish for about nine months, since his ordination as deacon. I asked him how he was getting on. He replied: "As long as I am visiting the people who don't go to Church I am quite happy; but when I am associating with the regular churchgoers I find so much jealousy and dissension—so many cliques—that I get sad and depressed."

Indeed I do not suggest that this is typical. No doubt it is rare, but that it should be even possible is our reproach.

Or again, how many Christians, who are judged to be pillars of their local Church, fail to realise that we Christians are a royal priesthood "*that we should show forth* the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light."⁷ How many Christians there are who ignore or disregard their obligation of evangelism! Indeed, would it not be fair to say of the average Churchman that he is content with

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

personal devotion, private and corporate, and with personal morality, and that only in somewhat rare instances does he recognise that his calling involves the duty of trying to win others to discipleship, by his example indeed but also by word? "I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart, my talk hath been of thy truth and of thy salvation."⁸

And yet if only we had proclaimed sufficiently in word and in deed what is so manifestly meant and implied by the doctrine of the Church, how our common life in this and other lands would have been transformed. The world—tired as it would be, and is—of worldliness, jaded with ceaseless efforts to pile sensation upon sensation, would have seen everywhere groups of people, serious and joyous, united in their devotion to their Lord, and constrained by love to do His will, and thus to war (as He warred) against hunger and disease, ignorance and joylessness, and to tell their precious secret to all who would hear. Then the children of this world, in ever increasing numbers, would have pressed into the fellowship of Christ's religion, and so by degrees, evil and strife would have grown less and less, and the first fruits of the spirit—love, joy and peace—would have prevailed. Let us "arise therefore and be doing."

CHAPTER XIV

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

*O blest Communion, fellowship divine,
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine,
Yet all are one in Thee for all are Thine—
Alleluia.*

W. WALSHAM HOW

IN any full treatment of this clause of the Creed—I—if it were taken alone—much would need to be said which has already been said in this book, and need not be repeated, in explanation of the previous clause. But something more must be added.

Many years ago, some books by the late Samuel Laing, which were very critical of Christianity, had a wide vogue in this country. In one of these books I remember reading the writer's taunt that many Christian people had a very imperfect knowledge of the faith which they professed; and, in order to illustrate his point, he put the rhetorical question—"How many Christian people could answer intelligently if they were asked the meaning of belief in the Communion of Saints?"

Probably the taunt was not wholly unjustified; and yet the explanation of this particular clause of the Creed is not far to seek.

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

(It may be right to draw passing attention to the suggestion that there may have been a mistake in the translation of this phrase from the Latin. The words are: "sanctorum communionem"; and "sanctorum," grammatically, could be either masculine or neuter, i.e. it might mean not holy people but holy things. There are those who incline to prefer the latter alternative. But in view of the fact that our Church has accepted the translation "Communion of Saints" and that this is what we say, and shall continue to say, whenever we recite the Creed, it hardly seems worth while to discuss the question.)

Let us take the phrase exactly as we have it. "Communion"—common union—implies fellowship. "Saints"—as often in the New Testament—is to be understood as signifying those who are "called to be saints," those who belong to the "Holy" Church—in fact Christians. Therefore, the doctrine of the Communion of Saints is the doctrine that all Christian people, wherever they may be, on earth or in Paradise, are united to each other in one common fellowship, because each is "a member of Christ." "All are one in Thee, for all are Thine."

It is often possible, by way of illustration, to compare great things with small. Let me suggest the illustration of the telephone. If in any given town the railway station, the police station, the

THIS IS OUR FAITH

town hall and the fire station are “on the telephone,” this does not mean that there will be wires from the railway station to the town hall, and from the town hall to the police station and so on; but that each of these will be connected by wire with the one common Exchange; and, through the Exchange, all are in potential communication with each other. Similarly, the Christian at his baptism is made a member of Christ; and all other Christians are members of Him; so that, in Him, all Christians form a Communion or fellowship. Moreover this bond between the Christian and his Master, and therefore between Christian and Christian, is not severed by distance nor by death. “Whether we live or die we are the Lord’s.”¹

It is hardly possible here even to indicate the manifold applications in practice of so fruitful a doctrine. Were these realised and practised, the whole face of society would be changed. If all the members of every congregation realised their fellowship in Christ, the family feeling which can be, and often is, so potent for good in the life of a parish would be universal.

Between Christians civil strife would cease, and war between nations professedly Christian would be felt to be intolerable. How could one member of the Communion of Saints thrust a bayonet into the body of one of his fellow members?

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

The sadness of the parting of friends, where that parting may be for life, would at least be mitigated if on both sides it were realised that there was no spiritual separation between the members of the fellowship. I recall a remark made to his friend in England by a man who was bound for Australia. "If you will pray for me on Tuesday I will pray for you, and then we shall at least meet once a week."

Once more, the sorrow of separation by death is lessened for those to whom the Communion of Saints becomes a great reality. In a parish of which I was once Vicar, in the north of England, there was a lady whose husband and only son died within a very short time; and when I was visiting her one day she said to me: "All my life I have repeated the Creed, and expressed my belief in the Communion of Saints, without attaching any real significance to the phrase; but now it has come to my rescue."

It is a spiritual bond by which we are bound. For my own part I shrink, instinctively, from the attempt to establish communication by material means, automatic writing, table turning, or any such medium. When the Lord said: "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed,"² He surely laid down the principle that we should not found religious convictions on the evidence afforded to the physical senses. It

THIS IS OUR FAITH

is rather by mutual prayer—I use the word in its widest sense—that we may best realise this aspect of the Communion of Saints. No doubt there are many Christians who invoke the saints, asking for their prayers; and they can claim authority for the practice. There are others (I am one) who feel themselves on surer ground when, day by day, they ask the Heavenly Father for the prayers of the saints. We need not doubt, surely, their offering of such prayers.

But we shall strengthen our bond of union and make it vivid when our prayers are offered for them. Never since I began to think seriously on the subject have I felt that prayers for those who have departed this life could be deprecated, save by those who had failed to grasp the real meaning of prayer and the real “status” of the departed; for surely they must be moving towards a perfection not yet attained, and surely it is right to pray for anything for which it is right to hope.

But the experience of millions of people during the dark days of the great war almost silenced the controversy—which need never have been—about our prayers for those on the other side.

And as these are offered day by day, a chain is forged which seems to hold us closer to our comrades of the advance guard, and them to us.

But prayer in the widest sense of the term will cover the Eucharist. The Communion of Saints

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

has not to be established; it is rather a fact which has to be realised. And the great Sacrament is the occasion “par excellence.” I may be allowed to narrate one piece of personal experience. It happened when the Eucharist was being offered in a church with which I have the closest personal links; the church of the parish in which I was born and lived till early manhood; the church of which my father was vicar, and of which, strangely enough, I was vicar myself in later years. We were keeping high festival; and in the early morning—hundreds of men and women were there before eight o’clock—I set myself this task of realising the Communion of Saints, having in mind relatives and friends of bygone days, who had rejoiced to worship in that house of God. It was a vivid, almost a sensible experience. The veil between this world and the other world seemed well-nigh transparent, as if one could almost reach the moving figures on the other side.

From time to time it is well, surely, thus to exercise the imagination, or (should I say?) to give wings to faith; for so the unseen world becomes real; and less strange the prospect of that day when (if God will) I

*Find myself by hands familiar beckoned
Unto my fitting place.³*

CHAPTER XV

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

*Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once;
And he that might the vantage best have took,
Found out the remedy. How would you be,
If he, which is the top of judgment, should
But judge you as you are? O! think on that,
And mercy then will breathe within your lips,
Like man new made.*

SHAKESPEARE

It is surely significant that the Creed contains a clause in which we express belief in the forgiveness of sins. The presence of such a clause may suggest to us two things:

(a) The heinousness of sin. Sin is so grave that its forgiveness must be the subject of an article of faith.

(b) The goodness of God; which is such that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

It seems appropriate that something should first be said of the nature of sin.

In the early chapters of Genesis, which, though we do not look upon them as conveying an historical account of the mode of creation, nor of the early history of the human race, are so full of spiritual truth, we find the story of the Fall.

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

In passing may I say how difficult I have found it to understand why the doctrine of the fall seems to constitute a difficulty to many people? I remember once having a conversation with the late Mr. John Galsworthy on this subject, and I told him my understanding of the doctrine of the fall, and expressed surprise that it should prove so common a stumbling-block to believers. And I remember that he wholly endorsed what I said, adding: "But that is not what most people mean by the doctrine of the fall."

However, when I speak of the fall, I have in my mind the thought that man, confronted with the choice between good and evil, chose at first, and so often chooses, the evil; and that this was, and is, the fall—a fact that must be self-evident to every intelligent human being.

But in the story as we have it in Genesis, a revelation is given—among much besides—of the essential nature of sin. It will be remembered that Adam and Eve are in a garden, in which we will suppose there are twelve trees; and God says that they may eat of the fruit of the trees with the exception (let us say) of number seven. Adam and his wife eat the fruit of this forbidden tree, and so they sin; not because they are eating fruit, which is permitted, but because they are eating fruit of the tree of which God had said that they should not eat. To do that is sin. Sin

THIS IS OUR FAITH

is the setting my will in opposition to the will of God when I know what it is that He wills. It is rebellion. As St. John says: "Sin is lawlessness."¹

Therefore, if God has forbidden certain things to be done, and, knowing this, I do these things, deliberately, I am setting my will in opposition to the will of God, and so I am sinning. For example, if God says "Thou shalt not steal," and I rob the till; or—trading on someone's ignorance or necessity—give him for an article much less than its worth; or if I travel first class with a third class ticket; or if I fail to pay a fair wage for a day's work, or fail to give a good day's work for a fair wage; I am stealing, and so am sinning. Similarly, if God says that certain things are to be done, and I neglect to do them, I am setting my will in opposition to the will of God, and so am sinning. And it is important to remember that the sin of omission is not less culpable than the sin of commission. Suppose, for example, there are two boys in school, and the master says to John, "Come up to my desk," and to Thomas, "Stop playing with your pencil," and John remains where he is, and Thomas continues his game, the immediate future of each of the boys is equally precarious; for one has neglected to do what he was told to do, and the other is continuing to do what he was told not to do. The

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

sin of the one is the sin of omission and of the other the sin of commission, but who is to say which is the greater sin?

Some years ago, I propounded this question to some of my parishioners, "Which do you think is the worst, to steal five shillings or deliberately to neglect to say your prayers?" Different answers were forthcoming, but I had to confess myself unable to pronounce an authoritative verdict.

There is a famous chapter in the Gospel of St. Matthew, chapter xxv, in which are three parables: the parable of the Talents, the parable of the Virgins, and the parable of the Sheep and the Goats; in each case those who are condemned are condemned not because they had done wicked things, but because they had failed to act. Their sins were sins of omission.

One other point should be noticed. It is not only the case that our Lord seems to condemn neglect equally with active evil; He also—against the popular judgment—seems to condemn what are sometimes spoken of as "respectable" sins, even more severely than those which are disreputable. What are sometimes spoken of as sins of disposition, malice, pride, self-righteousness, hypocrisy, and the like, are the sins upon which His severest censure fell. It is probably true that if a clergyman were to be seen staggering

THIS IS OUR FAITH

along the streets of his parish in a state of intoxication, his term of usefulness in that parish would be at an end; but if he were to indulge in idle or cruel gossip, or to be proud, or unforgiving, although such faults would seriously damage his influence, his position would not become intolerable.

In considering the subject of sin we shall do well frequently to correct our own, and the popular, impression by the standard of our Master.

Forgiveness

In the Nicene Creed forgiveness is associated with baptism. Baptism is the sacrament by which we are made members of Christ, and are grafted into the Holy stock. It has, moreover, been the belief of the Church that one who, as an adult, is converted to Christianity, and approaches baptism with due penitence for past sins, receives in that sacrament full forgiveness.

Some years ago, I was returning from a mission in Ireland, and as the boat crossed St. George's Channel, I noticed that a stream of foul water was being ejected from the hold. I watched this for some time, and observed that within a few seconds of its absorption into the sea, all the blackness and foulness of the water disappeared; and I knew that if I could have recovered it, I

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

should have found that not only had it been cleansed by its incorporation into the waters of the ocean, but that it would have become salt water—would have assumed the nature of the ocean of which it was now a part. Thus baptism into Christ means “a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness.”

Most Christians, however, were baptised as infants, and our special concern must be with the forgiveness of sins which are subsequent to our baptism.

For forgiveness to take effect there must be what we may call “forgivingness” on the one side and “forgiveableness” on the other. Of God’s forgivingness, i.e. of His readiness to forgive, we have certain assurance in Scripture and in our belief about him; but if His forgiveness is to take effect, there must be forgiveableness on our part, and that means penitence and godly sorrow for sin. In devotional books reference will often be made to self-examination, confession, contrition, restitution, purpose of amendment and so forth; but may we not say that if our *penitence* is real, all these will follow? Confession will follow because if we are sorry we shall wish to say so. Restitution (if that be possible) will follow, if penitence is sincere, for no man having, e.g. stolen five pounds will keep the money if he is really penitent. And “purpose of amendment”

THIS IS OUR FAITH

will follow, for no one can feel sorry for committing a fault, and can go to God and say so, if he is intending to repeat the offence.

If, therefore, we can achieve true penitence, i.e. godly sorrow for what we have done or left undone, whatever else is necessary for forgiveness must follow. I say "godly sorrow," for it is quite possible to be sorry when one has done wrong, because unpleasant consequences may have resulted from the wrong doing; as, for example, a child might be sorry who had wandered into forbidden ground and hurt himself. Such sorrow, however, is sorrow only for the consequences of the fault, not for the fault itself. How then, can we really care for having done wrong?

Three suggestions may be made.

(a) Most people, probably, have some ideal standard of conduct which they have constructed for themselves or have seen embodied in some other person who has won their admiration. And when they take the trouble to compare their actual with their ideal, and—looking into their hearts and lives—feel "the torment of the difference," they may thereby be moved to contrition.

(b) Few of us, in spite of our faults, would wish to be the cause of any moral damage to others. And yet, "no man liveth unto himself"; we cannot avoid the consequences of a bad

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

example or of the exercise of a bad influence. "A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit." All the time, therefore, we are (so to speak) writing with invisible ink, hardly realising what we write; but if the revelation could be made to us, we should doubtless learn that, here and there, without our knowledge and without our desire, we have, by our faults and failings, led others astray or hindered their spiritual progress. Too much reflection upon this tragic theme may make us morbid, but the thought may lead us, both to godly sorrow for what we have done, and to a renewed resolve that our life and conversation shall be such as may help and not hinder our fellow men in their Christian course.

(c) But chiefly, penitence is the result of an altered relationship to Jesus Christ. This is seen to be true, if we take examples from the New Testament. It was when Jesus "turned and looked on Peter" that Peter "went out and wept bitterly."²

Our Lord said of a certain woman whom He helped, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much."³ It was because she had begun to care, that she, through deep repentance, earned the right to forgiveness.

So it was with the "penitent thief"; at first, it is said that with his fellow criminal he reviled Jesus, but at last he turned to the Lord, with his

THIS IS OUR FAITH

plea for pardon. His penitence implied an “altered relationship” to Jesus Christ. And the moral is that we must make our religion what it is meant to be, a religion of relationship to a Person. The religion which consists in keeping the rules, is not adequate. Does anyone care very much for breaking a rule? During the course of the Great War some people were travelling in a railway carriage with a soldier, who was observed to be crying. When his companions asked for an explanation of his distress, he replied, “Lately I have been out in France, and I have been doing things which are wrong; and I am going home to see my mother, and my mother will kiss me, and I cannot bear that kiss.”

The man was not unhappy because he was a “transgressor,” but because he loved his mother, and could not bear to grieve her.

If our religion is, or becomes, a religion of personal relationship to Jesus Christ—a relationship of love—then when we have done wrong we shall be sorry with a godly sorrow, because we have grieved the One whom we hate to grieve.

Penitence is an altered relationship to Jesus Christ.

Finally, how does forgiveness take effect?

We may kneel down in our own room, and tell God we are sorry for our sins and neglects; and if we are sincere, then and there we are forgiven.

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

There are, however, those who are not successful thus in quieting their consciences, and the Church, the Body of Christ, is charged with the duty of pronouncing God's forgiveness upon penitent sinners; and it is beyond question that some people find more sure relief from the burden of sin though the Church's absolution than they find in any other way. In the book of Common Prayer three forms of absolution are provided:

(a) In morning and evening prayer. (b) In the Communion service, and (c) in the service for the visitation of the sick. Although these forms differ verbally, they may not differ doctrinally, for the pronouncing of absolution in each case is restricted to the priest. The sinner, therefore, who wishes to receive God's absolution through the ministry of the Church may, at morning or evening prayer, or at the Communion service, use the general form of confession in the manner suggested by a rubric in the Prayer Book (it is to be found in the "Forms of Prayer to be used at Sea") which runs thus:

"When there shall be imminent danger, as many as can be spared from necessary service in the ship shall be called together, and make an humble Confession of their sin to God: In which every one ought seriously to reflect

THIS IS OUR FAITH

upon those particular sins of which his conscience shall accuse him."

He may then "appropriate to himself" the absolution subsequently pronounced by the priest.

This, however, is not enough for everyone, and there are those who find a value in a personal absolution following upon personal and private confession. Such provision is made in the Book of Common Prayer: for instance the closing paragraph of the first long exhortation in the Communion service runs thus:

"And because it is requisite, that no man should come to the Holy Communion, but with a full trust in God's mercy, and with a quiet conscience; therefore if there be any of you, who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned Minister of God's Word, and open his grief; that by the ministry of God's holy Word he may receive the benefit of absolution together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness."

Again, in the Order for the Visitation of the Sick, comes the rubric:

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

“Here shall the sick person be moved to make a special Confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter. After which Confession, the Priest shall absolve him (if he humbly and heartily desire it) after this sort.”

The form of absolution which the Prayer Book provides in such cases runs thus:

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him, of His great mercy forgive thee thine offences: And by His authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
Amen.”

The form of these words should be noted, for it expresses the principle that God’s grace of absolution (and this would apply to other forms of grace) is mediated by the Church, the mystical Body of Christ—the Body of which He Himself is head; and that the minister, be he Bishop or priest, is only the particular member of the Body detailed for this particular function.

One other point in regard to private confession seems to demand a word—but it does not raise any doctrinal issue. It is undeniable that the discipline of confessing particular sins in the hearing

THIS IS OUR FAITH

of one of our fellow men is, in fact, severer than the discipline of confessing sins secretly to God. Possibly this ought not to be the case, but it will not be questioned that if a man has committed a sin of which he is ashamed, he will find it easier to confess to God in the secrecy of his own room than to confess to God aloud in the presence of one who, although pledged to secrecy, is thus made aware of the offence; and sometimes the severity of this discipline is just what we need when we have sinned, and is a help to the avoidance of a repetition of the offence.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING

*Others mistrust and say “But time escapes!
Live now or never!”
He said “What’s time? Leave now for dogs and apes.
Man has Forever.”*

ROBERT BROWNING

BEFORE dealing with the actual closing words of the Apostles' Creed, it may be well to say something on the general question of the importance of belief in a future life.

In one of Mary Webb's novels, *Golden Arrow*, Deborah's husband, Stephen, the tall, strong foreman at the mine, finds himself on the day of the harvest festival tea overwhelmed with a sense of negation: "negation" was the only fact, as he thought. So, for a time, he loses the hope of survival. Mary Webb writes: "The idea of continued existence after death had been to him a sufficient reason for all effort, a sufficient reward for all hardships. But it seemed perfectly useless to him to make any effort if the grave were all."

It is, indeed, the case that the riddle of life is insoluble if existence ends at death.

THIS IS OUR FAITH

But there is a widespread scepticism about a future life. Dr. Inge, the late Dean of St. Paul's, has said that "it is evident that any faith in a life beyond the grave burns very dimly in the modern world."¹

Such scepticism may have dangerous issues. On the one hand, it may lead to flippancy: "Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die,"² to a philosophy of life which is summed up in the words: "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."³ Sceptics of this type may pay heed to the classical adage: *Carpe diem quam minimum credula postero*; they may live for the pleasures of sense, like Omar Khayyam, whose call is:

*Oh, come with old Khayyam, and leave the Wise
To talk; one thing is certain, that Life flies;
One thing is certain, and the Rest is lies;
The Flower that once has blown for ever dies.⁴*

Alternatively, the result of disbelief may be a grim fatalism. which can easily lead to despair, even sometimes to suicide.

Others again—utterly dissatisfied with scepticism, but lacking strong faith—have a legitimate longing for a deeper assurance of continued life and of reunion hereafter with those whom they have loved on earth. Their point of view is suggested in Sir William Watson's familiar lines:

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

*But ah! to know not, while with friends I sit,
And while the purple joy is passed about,
Whether 'tis ampler day divinelier lit,
Or homeless night without;
And whether, stepping forth, my soul shall see
New prospects, or fall sheer—a blinded thing!
There is, O grave, thy hourly victory,
And there, O death, thy sting.⁵*

It will be generally agreed that in view of widespread scepticism, and of the danger, or tragedy, of loss of faith in the continued existence beyond the grave, the subject of “the Life of the World to Come” is one which demands and deserves the best consideration which it may receive from thoughtful men and women.

For Christian people the resurrection of Jesus Christ affords the strongest justification of belief in a future life, and of this something has already been written in an earlier chapter. But at this point it may be worth while to indicate—although very briefly—that quite apart from “Christian evidence,” there is much which can be urged in support of the hope that “this present world is not the end.”

(i) In nature there are useful analogies which, if they can hardly be considered as establishing survival, at least prepare our minds for favourable consideration of the evidence when it is presented. The annual miracle of spring is eloquent of the

THIS IS OUR FAITH

possibility of resurrection. Does anything appear more hopelessly dead than a thorn hedge in winter? Black and leafless, it is to all outward appearances lifeless; and one who had never witnessed the renewal of life in spring-time might well be moved to say: "Its life is done." And yet within a few months the great revival takes place. Or again, the butterfly, emerging from a comparatively low form of life into its radiant and splendid freedom, has become a recognised type of resurrection to a new and higher form of life.

(2) It is surely worthy of notice that every particle of a human body disappears and is replaced several times in the course of a long life, while the identity of the person to whom these successive bodies belong remains the same. The complete change takes place, apparently, in a period of approximately seven years.⁶ If, therefore, a man lives to be seventy years of age, he may be said to have survived the dissolution of ten bodies during his lifetime. Yet his identity remains. For if he leaves home and returns in, say, ten years' time, with his "new" eyes he recognises the familiar scene, and with his "new" brain he recalls the associations of earlier life. Surely it is not unreasonable to suggest that, if the man himself survives the dissolution of other bodies, he may be capable of surviving the dissolution of the last. There is, in fact, something

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

in man which is independent of the matter of which his body is at any time composed—something which, apparently, lasts.

(3) There seems to have been in all ages an instinct of survival which refuses to be crushed. Many years before Christ came, the Greek poet Euripides asked the rhetorical question: "Who knows whether life perchance may not be death, and death the truer life?" Elsewhere abundant traces of a similar instinct of survival are to be found. Lecturing in London towards the end of the year 1932, Sir James Frazer said that "men commonly believed that their conscious being would not end at death. This belief in the immortality of the soul was not confined to the historical religions now professed by most civilized nations. It was held by most, if not all, the peoples of lower culture whom we called savages or barbarians, and there was reason to believe that the belief was native. The hope of immortality after death was cherished thousands of years before Buddha, Christ and Mohamed were born. . . . In the sense of the preservation of personality after death the belief in immortality had been remarkably persistent among mankind from the earliest times."

(4) It may also be said that in various forms of art we have intimations of immortality. Significantly, we are accustomed to speak of the great

THIS IS OUR FAITH

masters of art as being among the “immortals,” and we apply the same term to their works. Especially does this seem to be true of music. It is said that when Beethoven was dying he observed to a friend, “I feel that I am only just beginning.” If only on account of his art, his soul “demanded” survival. Robert Browning has given notable expression to the thought that the artist reaches by instinct, and because of his art, conclusions to which others may only be brought by reason.

*Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of weal and
woe;
But God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear;
The rest may reason and welcome; 'tis we musicians
know.⁷*

(5) Our moral sense seems to demand that there shall be a “reckoning”; and so to demand survival. It may be said that such a demand of the moral sense in no way constitutes an argument for survival, but does it not? How would that demand have arisen and survived if it were not destined for satisfaction? To every human faculty which persists, some fact corresponds. To the faculty of sight, the fact of light. A creature such as the mole which lives underground, eschewing the light, loses the faculty of

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

sight. So should we all if the sun were extinguished. No faculty survives without its corresponding fact. Similarly, a persistent human instinct such as this instinct of survival gives promise of its eventual satisfaction.

(6) It may further be said that, even apart from Christianity, acceptance of Theism involves the hope of survival. The late Dr. R. H. Charles used to teach that the eschatology of any people would always depend upon their theology. In other words, that their beliefs about a future life were determined by their belief about God. Wherever, therefore, there is any real belief in Providence—in the “good God”—there some hope of the future life is assured. One of the Apocryphal writers says: “If Thou shalt lightly and suddenly destroy him which with so great labour was fashioned by Thy commandment, to what purpose was he made?”⁸ To this question there is no answer; and therefore it is impossible for anyone who has faith enough to address a Personal God to believe that inevitable annihilation awaits His children. The late Lord Tennyson—Poet Laureate—once said to a friend: “There is something watching over us, and our individuality endures. That’s my faith, and that’s all my faith.” It would surely be possible to reduce the two articles of this brief creed to one. If God is, man has the hope of survival.

THIS IS OUR FAITH

"God created man to be immortal",⁹ and the Father will not annihilate His child.

Thus along several converging lines we are led towards a goal of belief in the life of the world to come.

Let us now consider belief in the resurrection of the body. It may well be to us a cause of thanksgiving that the Christian doctrine of the life of the world to come is a doctrine of the resurrection of the body. No doctrine of the immortality of the soul would meet our need, for we have no faculty whereby we can conceive the existence of a soul independently of a body. Our natural human longing is expressed in the words:

*Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still.¹⁰*

But because the doctrine of the resurrection of the body is commonly misinterpreted, it has become a source of difficulty rather than of comfort to many believers. Let me recall two cases within my own experience. I had been making an appeal for voluntary workers in one of the parishes of which I was Vicar. After the service, a stranger called at my house and volunteered his services, but very diffidently. "I am not sure," he said, "whether you will accept me, for I am unorthodox." When I came to inquire what form his unorthodoxy assumed, he said, "Well,

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

of course I don't believe in the resurrection of the body."

In my next parish a man of between forty and fifty years of age presented himself as a possible candidate for Confirmation. But he thought he might not be accepted, because he said he could not profess his belief in all the articles of the Creed. When I asked him to specify his difficulty he said: "Well, for one thing, I don't believe in the resurrection of the body."

When I came to inquire further into these cases I discovered, not to my surprise, that both my friends held the theory that the resurrection of the body inevitably meant the resuscitation from the grave of whatever was laid therein at burial. A good deal of countenance has been lent to this view, for example, by such pictures as that of the late Lord Leighton: "The Sea gave up the dead that were in it," where the bodies of those who had been committed to the deep are seen emerging from the waters; or by such hymns as that in which occur the words "On that happy Easter morning all the graves their dead restore."

This view of the resurrection of the body must be rejected. It is beset with insuperable difficulty, for the same material particles in the course of thousands of years may well have formed a part of scores of different human bodies. And if it be said that "nothing is too hard for the Lord,"

THIS IS OUR FAITH

the reply must be that this does not signify that what is absurd or illogical or contradictory comes within the scope of omnipotence.

The classic passage on this subject in the New Testament is to be found in the fifteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians. The difficulty felt by the people of Corinth to whom St. Paul wrote, did not relate to Christ's resurrection, the fact of which they were ready to accept, but to the general resurrection. Had St. Paul actually said to them: "If Christ be preached that He rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" they would have had an easy answer, namely, that the cases entirely differed. The Lord's Body was laid for a few hours in the cold grave and then passed on to new life, not seeing corruption. Manifestly this was not the case with men and women who might have been buried for thousands of years and whose bodies were disintegrated.

So St. Paul expounds his doctrine: "But some men will say 'How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?' Thou foolish man, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die; and that which thou sowest thou sowest not the body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain. But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. . . . So also is

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

the resurrection of the dead.” “That which thou sowest, thou sowest *not* that body that shall be.” St. Paul’s point is that when a seed is sown in the ground, that which rises is not the seed (which remains in the ground) but yet is something which maintains identity with what was sown: “To every seed his own body.” For example, a hyacinth bulb is placed in the soil. Eventually there is a “resurrection”; but what rises is not a hyacinth bulb, but something more glorious and beautiful, the flower of the hyacinth. And yet, though the flower is not the bulb, there is an inevitable association between the two. From the hyacinth bulb nothing but a hyacinth flower can be produced: “To each seed a body of its own.”

“So also is the resurrection of the dead.” Our bodies are sown here (the reference is not solely or primarily to burial, but to our earthly life) and hereafter we shall rise; but that which rises will not be that which was sown, although there is a direct connection between the two. Of his resurrection body—the spiritual body referred to by St. Paul—each man may say: “It will not be *this* body, but it will be *mine*.”

To make my meaning clear, let me apply an imaginary test. Let me suppose that a man’s body is, after his death, sealed in a leaden casket; and let me suppose that after the end of the world

THIS IS OUR FAITH

he is allowed to re-visit the scene of his earthly life; the supposition being that this planet continues to exist. In his spiritual body he enters the tomb in which the old body was buried, and opens the leaden casket. Will he, or will he not, find anything within? It is idle for anyone to decline to meet this test on the ground that the conditions are unlikely to be fulfilled. On the supposition of its possibility, what would be the answer? In view of what has been said it is hardly necessary to indicate my own view that the remains of the natural body would be found.

But if this be so, what is the bearing of such a doctrine of resurrection upon the historic fact of the empty grave, in the case of our Lord? Let me say that I accept without doubt or hesitation the fact as recorded in the Gospels that on the first Easter morning our Lord's grave was empty. It will be remembered, however, that in the chapter of St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians to which allusion has already been made, St. Paul says: "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. (For the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall all be changed.) For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality."¹¹ St. Paul is considering the case of those who should be alive at the

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

coming of Christ, and he suggests that they would not die nor be buried—"We shall not all sleep"—but that the change from the natural to the spiritual body will be effected in a moment of time, the corruptible thus putting on incorruption. In other words he distinguishes two classes: (*a*) those who die and are buried and rise to newness of life; and (*b*) those who, being alive at the second Advent, are transmuted from the natural to the spiritual. The case of our Lord—obviously exceptional—must be put in line with the latter rather than with the former of the types distinguished by St. Paul, the type, namely, of those whose earthly bodies do not see corruption.

In the accounts of the post-resurrection appearances of our Lord we have some indication of the mode of existence of the spiritual body. After His resurrection our Lord seems to have passed at will from place to place without traversing distance, and from without to within locked doors without need of the opening of the door. The spiritual body can be handled: "A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have,"¹² but it is endowed with powers altogether beyond those of the natural body. "It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power."¹³

If we can accept St. Paul's reasonable doctrine of the resurrection of the body, then (and not

THIS IS OUR FAITH

otherwise) is it possible for us to form some conception of the life everlasting. And what a glorious prospect is offered to our gaze! It is said of John Smith, formerly a master at Harrow School, that one of the boys said to him one day: "Sir, have you ever been to Switzerland?" The reply was startlingly unconventional. "No, lad, it is one of the places I hope to go to when I am dead." John Smith may have intended to suggest that even Switzerland might be found among the "many mansions" of the Father's House; at least he must have wished to teach his young friend that we are justified in visualising heaven in terms of earth at its best. If, in the life to come, we have spiritual bodies, with eyes and ears and feet and hands, there will surely be beautiful things to be seen—the surpassing glory and wonder of all the universes, beautiful sounds to be heard, music such as we have never known—and scope for endless activity. So far is heaven from answering the description of one of our poets who speaks of the "stagnation of your perfect state"; so far from the truth was the church-warden to whom Mr. F. D. Maurice put the question: "What do you look for in the life to come?" receiving the answer: "Oh, I suppose I hope for heaven, but for goodness' sake, Mr. Maurice, don't introduce such depressing subjects."

THE LIFE EVERLASTING

St. John's ideal Church is drawn for us after the likeness of a city—a garden city—suggesting every possible activity of head and heart and hand. "I count that heaven itself is only work to a surer issue."¹⁴

And then there is the hope of reunion without fear of separation: reunion with those whom we have "loved and lost," and reunion with those with whom we have had no opportunity here of developing friendships. "I look upon this world," said Bishop King, of Lincoln, "as the place for making friends, and the next world as the place for enjoying them."

Finally, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent."¹⁵ If it is true that "eternal" is a term of value rather than of duration, and that the eternal life is not confined to the future, it is also true that it can only be realised to the utmost hereafter. Thrilling indeed is worship even upon earth, when the conditions are the best possible and we play our part as worthily as we may; but let us imagine worship as it might be, without any let or hindrance, and we shall have a faint foretaste of one of the supreme joys of the life of the world to come.

But yet, even when we have given fullest play to our imagination, it still remains that the veil is unlifted. St. John the Divine, after exhausting

THIS IS OUR FAITH

all his resources of eloquence, seems at last to despair of the power of words to tell the tale, and ends on a quiet note, rich withal and deep: "His servants shall serve Him. And they shall see His Face."¹⁶

To that vision—to that service—no limits are set: for each inheritor of the Kingdom shall hear from the lips of the Giver of all good things the words of richest promise: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."¹⁷

THE END

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THIS IS OUR FAITH

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THIS IS OUR FAITH

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THIS IS OUR FAITH

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SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

CHAPTER I

When, in repeating the Creed, the Christian says "I believe," what is the extent of responsibility implied in his use of the words?

CHAPTER II

On what lines would you proceed

- (a) If you had to argue with an unbeliever about the Being of God.
- (b) If you had to instruct an unprejudiced, but ignorant, learner.

CHAPTER III

- (a) What, in your judgment, constitutes the greatest obstacle to belief in God?
- (b) In what ways would you try to help another to overcome this obstacle?

CHAPTER IV

- (a) How would you distinguish between atheism and agnosticism?
- (b) How would you deal with each?

THIS IS OUR FAITH

CHAPTER V

It is said that Mr. W. E. Gladstone spoke of the Incarnation as “the one hope of our poor wayward humanity.”

- (a) Could you justify his saying?
- (b) What, to you, is the most convincing evidence of the truth of the Incarnation?

CHAPTER VI

Do you feel that the true doctrine of the Incarnation is bound up with that of the Virgin Birth?

If so—Why?

If not—Why?

CHAPTER VII

(a) It is said that much harm has been occasioned by wrong theories of the Atonement. Have you found this to be the case?

(b) What seems to you to be the essence of the doctrine?

CHAPTER VIII

Objection has been taken to the Apostles' Creed because of the inclusion therein of the clause “He descended into hell.”

- (a) Do you think that this objection is reasonable?
- (b) How would you answer an objector?

QUESTIONS

CHAPTER IX

- (a) What is to you the strongest reason for believing in the Resurrection of our Lord?
- (b) What is the bearing of the fact of the Resurrection upon our life (i) Here? (ii) Hereafter?

CHAPTER X

Of all the festivals of the Church, Ascension Day is the least generally observed.

- (a) Is this neglect due to lack of interest or of opportunity?
- (b) If the former, what is the reason for the lack of interest?

CHAPTER XI

(a) What do you conceive to be the essence of the "judgment?"

(b) St. Paul writes: "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." Supposing these last words to apply to a future judgment, how would you explain them?

CHAPTER XII

"We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost" (Acts xix. 2).

(a) For practical purposes would this represent the attitude of the average churchgoer?

THIS IS OUR FAITH

(b) If you think this to be the case, how would you account for this defect?

CHAPTER XIII

"Religion? Yes; but why the Church?"

(a) How would you answer the plea contained in these words?

(b) What do you feel to be the especial privileges of Church membership?

CHAPTER XIV

It has been said that there is no clause of the Creed more full of significance than "I believe in the Communion of Saints."

(a) How would you defend this statement?

(b) Do you think the doctrine of the Communion of Saints is an effectual antidote to spiritualism?

CHAPTER XV

(a) Does it surprise you that the Creed should contain a clause expressing belief in the Forgiveness of Sins?

(b) Is it in your judgment correct to say that the "world" is more apt to condemn sins of commission than sins of omission, and sins of the flesh than sins of disposition; and if so, would you agree or disagree with the world's verdict?

QUESTIONS

CHAPTER XVI

- (a) What is the popular view of the “Resurrection of the Body? How would you criticise it?
- (b) If you hope for Heaven, to what specially do you look forward?

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